taste&flair

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Tuscan treasures *Indian soups* **Chia seeds**
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It hasn't been much of a winter – not much scope for getting cosy near a roaring log-fire. But the upside of this is that the walls aren't growing entire gardens of mould and fungi, unlike last year when it poured almost every day and the temperature plunged to zero degrees at one point. No rain has its obvious downside, too, of course – gardens drying out and the countryside looking less than lush and fabulous. But with days growing longer, and the light so bright, it's hard to avoid taking a long, hard look around the inside of your home and working out what needs to be done. If you need to paint some walls or furniture, now would be a good time to do it. You can throw the windows wide open, let the air through, and not bother about the flies which haven't yet begun to sky-bomb the island.

We've had a lovely time working with our cooks for this issue – Michael, Jade, Claire, James and our cocktail-maker extraordinaire, Rodney – and hope that you will enjoy the results. Claire's introduced me to chia seeds, which I had never thought of working with or eating before. She's now a convert. There's plenty for you to read, too, so have a lazy day with your copy of Taste&Flair, and we'll see you again on 3rd April.

Daphne



Rococo chinoiserie - see our feature on page 111.jpg



Cover Photograph: Claire Borg

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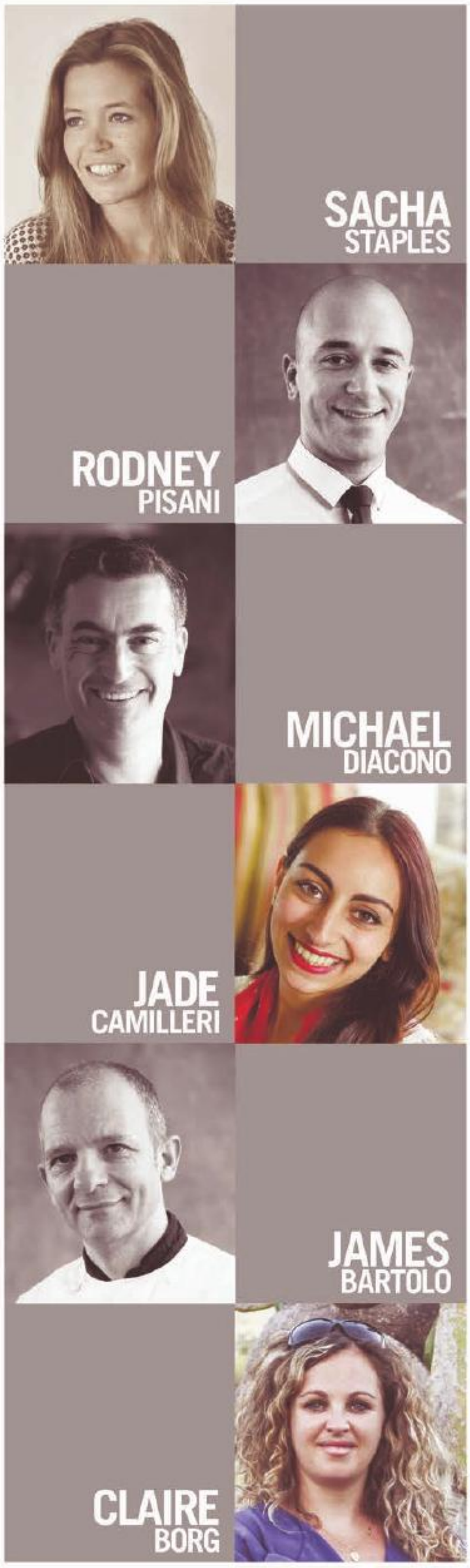
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T&F PROMOTION





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Villa Corinthia

Timeless and elegant, the Villa Corinthia restaurant is a sophisticated space where you can dine in refined luxury. Situated in the century-old, beautifully restored villa, the restaurant features a menu bursting with authentic flavour, each dish created using sustainably sourced, fresh, local produce. The new menu has been crafted using the very best Malta has to offer this spring, while keeping signature favourites, including the well-loved crepe suzette, which will be prepared right at your table.

The Villa Corinthia is open for dinner.



The Orange Grove

Whether for a breakfast business meeting or a quiet lunch, the Orange Grove is an informal meeting-place where a delicious buffet is served for lunch everyday, followed by a decadent tea spread in the afternoon. Light bites, sandwiches and drinks are served all day, as well as a scrumptious range of piping hot chocolate made using the world's finest chocolate brand, Valrhona.

The Orange Grove is open daily from 7am to 6.30pm.



Rickshaw

Rickshaw one of the most popular oriental eateries and among the most established, with a decades-old legacy. It is the regular recipient of top awards from the Definitively Good Guide to Dining in Malta. The menu carries delectable dishes from Thailand, Japan, Singapore, China, and beyond. The drinks include refreshing Thai cocktails, specialised Chinese beer, and Japanese sake served hot or cold.

The Rickshaw is open for dinner from Tuesday to Saturday.





Palace *this Spring*

Villa Corinthia • Caprice Lounge & Terrace
Orange Grove • Rickshaw Restaurant

day is a dining experience to be savoured at the **Corinthia Palace Hotel & Spa.**



Caprice Lounge & Terrace

The Caprice now has a brand new menu to match its recently-renovated surroundings. Its bar snacks and informal eats include meze, oriental bites and delicious fish 'n' chips. Happy Hours at the bar run from 9pm to closing time, when you can enjoy half-price on drinks: wines, spirits and cocktails. The bar is also stocked with an impressive selection of fine whiskies and brandies. The lounge leads to the Caprice Wine Garden, a tranquil space where you can sit in peace with your drink.

The Caprice is open daily from 5.30pm to 1am.

COMING SOON...

The Summer Kitchen

This May the Corinthia Palace Hotel & Spa's popular Summer Kitchen returns, with a menu that is better than ever. Served outdoors overlooking the pool and gardens, The Summer Kitchen is the perfect place to while away a wonderful evening under the stars, whether for a glass of wine and a platter of scrumptious nibbles, or a meal of antipasto, pasta, pizza, fresh fish, grilled meat and – of course – the famous Summer Kitchen burgers.

The Summer Kitchen will open by day on 1 May, and for dinner from 1 June.

Grand Afternoon Tea Dance

On Sunday, 24 April, the Corinthia Palace Hotel & Spa will be bringing back the glamour of the traditional British Afternoon Tea Dance at their signature venue, the Villa Corinthia. Some of Malta's best musicians will play the sounds that have you dancing the afternoon away in glorious surroundings.

The elegant menu, crafted especially for the event by executive chef Stefan Hogan, will include a finger-sandwich selection, with classics like the roast ham and light grain mustard, and smoked salmon with chive labneh; hand-made cakes and pastries, which include the Vhalrone Ivoire 33% violet parfait and the rose, pistachio and chai magnum, and warm scones with strawberry preserve and clotted cream.

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CHIASEEDS

Chia seeds come from a flowering plant which is native to Mexico and Guatemala, Salvia hispanica. Ground and whole chia seeds are used throughout central and south America in drinks and foods, though they are less well known in Europe.

Recipes, food styling and photography: CLAIRE BORG.



CINNAMON BUNDT CAKE

Make this in a bundt tin. Serve slices of this cake with cream cheese, strawberry chia pulp, strawberries and chia seeds.

YOU WILL NEED:

250g flour • 250g sugar • 250g soft butter
250g eggs • 1 ½ teaspoons cinnamon
a few drops vanilla essence
2 ½ teaspoons baking powder
porridge oats and butter to coat tin

1. First, prepare the bundt tin by greasing it with butter and then scattering the surface with porridge oats. Preheat the oven to gas mark 4/180C (160C if fan-operated).

2. Beat together the soft butter and sugar until fluffy. Add the eggs, one by one, and the vanilla and beat until smooth.

3. Fold in the mix of sifted flour, cinnamon and baking powder.

4. Pour the batter into the tin and bake it for 40-45 minutes. When ready, stand the tin on a wire rack until it cools. Turn it out when cool.

To make the strawberry chia pulp

Wash and hull a punnet of strawberries, then mash them and mix in 2 tablespoons of chia seeds. Let it stand for a minimum of 30 minutes before serving, but it will keep in the fridge for up to three days.

CHIA, COCONUT & RASPBERRY JARS

Makes 2 jars – ideal for breakfast

YOU WILL NEED:

1 ½ cups of coconut milk
a few drops of vanilla essence
a pinch of ground cinnamon
honey or agave syrup, to taste
6 tablespoons chia seeds
Raspberries, for serving

Mix together the coconut milk, cinnamon, vanilla and honey. Taste to test the sweetness and correct to your liking. Add the chia seeds, stir and leave to stand for at least 2 hours. Then serve this in jars topped with fresh raspberries.

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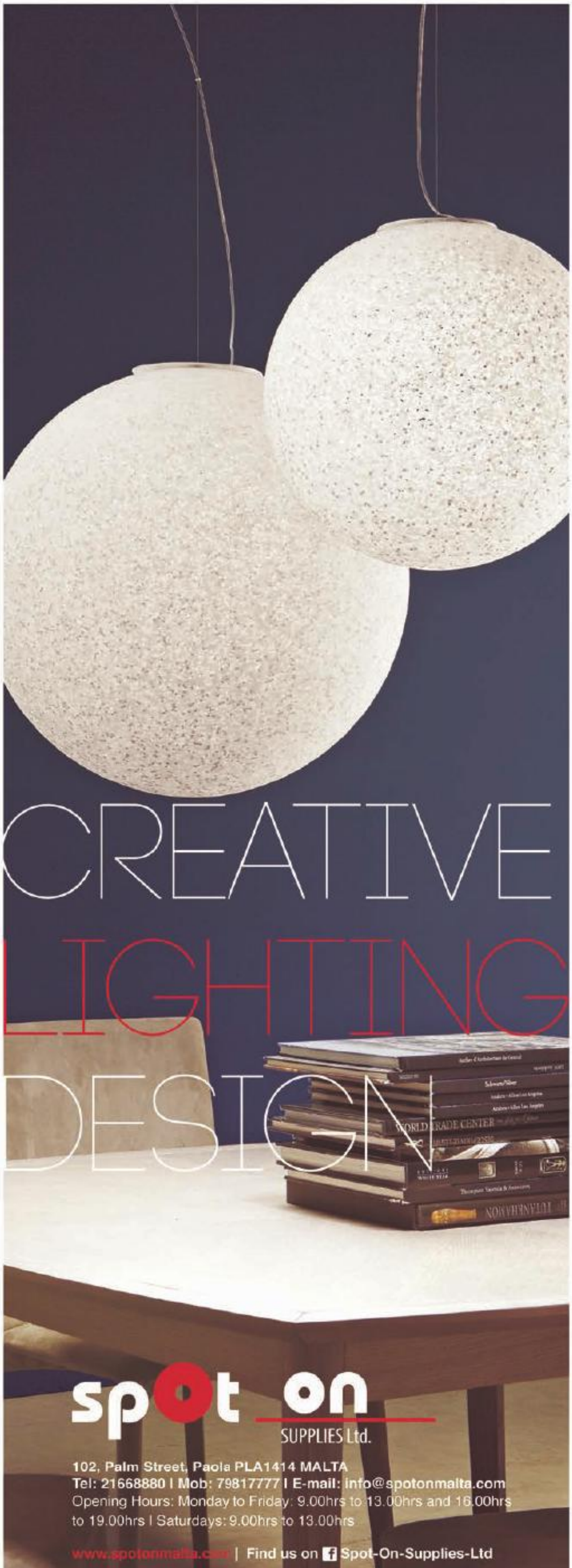
BREAKFAST CRUMPETS WITH GRAPEFRUIT, CHIA&BRIE

YOU WILL NEED:

1 grapefruit • 3 tablespoons chia seeds • brie dried cranberries • crumpets (ready bought)

Squeeze the grapefruit and mix the chia seeds into the pulpy juice. Let it stand for an hour until it thickens like jam. Toast the crumpets and serve them topped with sliced brie, grapefruit-chia mix and dried cranberries.







VANILLA, CHIA, YOGHURT & RASPBERRY CUPS

YOU WILL NEED:

1 small vanilla yoghurt
4 tablespoons chia seeds
1 punnet raspberries

1. Mash the raspberries and mix in 2 tablespoons chia seeds. Let it stand for at least 30 minutes before using.
2. Mix the yoghurt with 2 tablespoons of chia seeds.
3. Layer the cup with raspberry-chia mix, then the chia vanilla yoghurt and top with fresh raspberries.
4. You can also mix the chia-raspberry into plain yoghurt, sweetened with some honey. Serve with fresh raspberries – the yoghurt will be speckled with pink.



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INDIAN SOUPS AND MORE

This month JADE CAMILLERI has made soups and accompaniments inspired by the kitchen of her Kashmiri grandmother.

Photography: Alan Carville

Styling: Daphne Caruana Galizia

Handmade glazed pottery bowls: Mary Ann Attard



T&F WARMING

KADHI

SINDHI VEGETARIAN CURRY SOUP



YOU WILL NEED:

½ cup gram flour (besan) – this is flour made from ground chickpeas
3 tablespoons oil • ½ teaspoon fenugreek seeds (mathi)
½ teaspoon cumin seeds (jeera) • 10 curry leaves
1/8 teaspoon asafetida (hing) – you can use garlic instead
3 whole red chilli peppers; adjust to taste
½ teaspoon turmeric (haldi) • 1 tablespoon grated ginger
½ teaspoon red chilli powder; adjust to taste
3 tablespoons tamarind pulp (imli) – otherwise, use lemon or lime juice
teaspoon salt • cups of bottled water
mixed vegetables - I have used 2 large courgettes, quartered down the length; 2 medium carrots, chopped into rounds; 1 small potato, cubed; some green beans, chopped into bite-sized pieces

1. Heat the oil in a saucepan over medium high heat, put in the fenugreek and cumin. When the seeds start to pop, add asafoetida (or garlic), chilli pepper, ginger, and curry leaves, and stir for a few seconds.

2. Reduce the heat to medium and add the gram flour, stirring continually till it has become golden brown and aromatic (about 4-5 minutes).

3. Slowly add about 4 cups of water, stirring continuously to avoid lumps forming. Add the turmeric and chopped vegetables.

4. Bring the soup to the boil, turn the heat down to medium-low and cover the pan. Let it simmer for about 10 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender. Add more water if necessary, but the soup should not be overly liquid. Add the tamarind pulp (or lemon and lime juice), let it simmer for another seven minutes over medium-low heat and serve.

SERVES 4

VEGETABLE PAKORAS



SERVES 4

YOU WILL NEED:

medium courgettes, thinly sliced in rounds
3 bell-peppers (1 yellow, 1 red, 1 green), thinly sliced lengthwise
½ kilo gram flour (besan) - can be substituted with ¾ cup rice flour
tablespoons finely chopped
2 small onions
fresh coriander
1 tablespoon coarsely ground coriander
1 teaspoon cumin seeds, dry-fried and ground
2 green/red chillies, chopped; adjust to taste
½ teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
1 teaspoon salt; adjust to taste
vegetable oil for frying
Mix all dry ingredients together: gram flour, rice flour, coriander powder, ground cumin seeds, bicarbonate of soda and salt.

1. Add water slowly to make a smooth batter with the consistency of pancake batter.

2. Add the green chillies and fresh coriander and mix well. Heat at least one inch of oil in a frying pan over medium heat. To test, put one drop of batter in the oil. This should form a small ball on the surface of the pan, but not change colour right away. Dip the vegetable slices into the batter one at a time, making sure each slice is covered, then drop them slowly into the hot oil.

3. Fry the pakoras in small batches, three to four minutes per batch, turning occasionally, until both sides are golden brown. Serve hot and crisp.

4. If the oil is too hot the pakoras will not be crisp; if the oil is not hot enough, they will be greasy. The right temperature comes with practice.

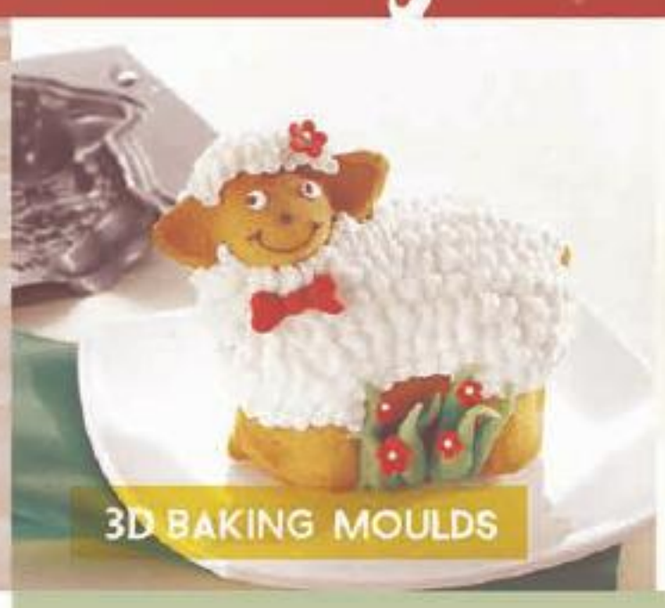
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T&F WARMING

VEGETABLE & RED LENTIL STEW

SERVES 4

YOU WILL NEED:

400g red lentils
2 medium courgettes, chopped coarsely
2 green chillies, slit open
1 teaspoon red chilli powder (optional); adjust to taste
1 onion, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 tseaspoons ground cumin
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon fenugreek seeds
a generous handful of fresh coriander Leaves
2 knobs ghee or unsalted butter
2 tablespoons tamarind juice – or use a mix of lemon and lime juice
½ teaspoon garam masala
1 teaspoon ginger paste or fresh grated ginger
3-4 tomatoes, peeled and deseeded, or ½ cup tinned tomato pulp
¼ cup warm water • salt

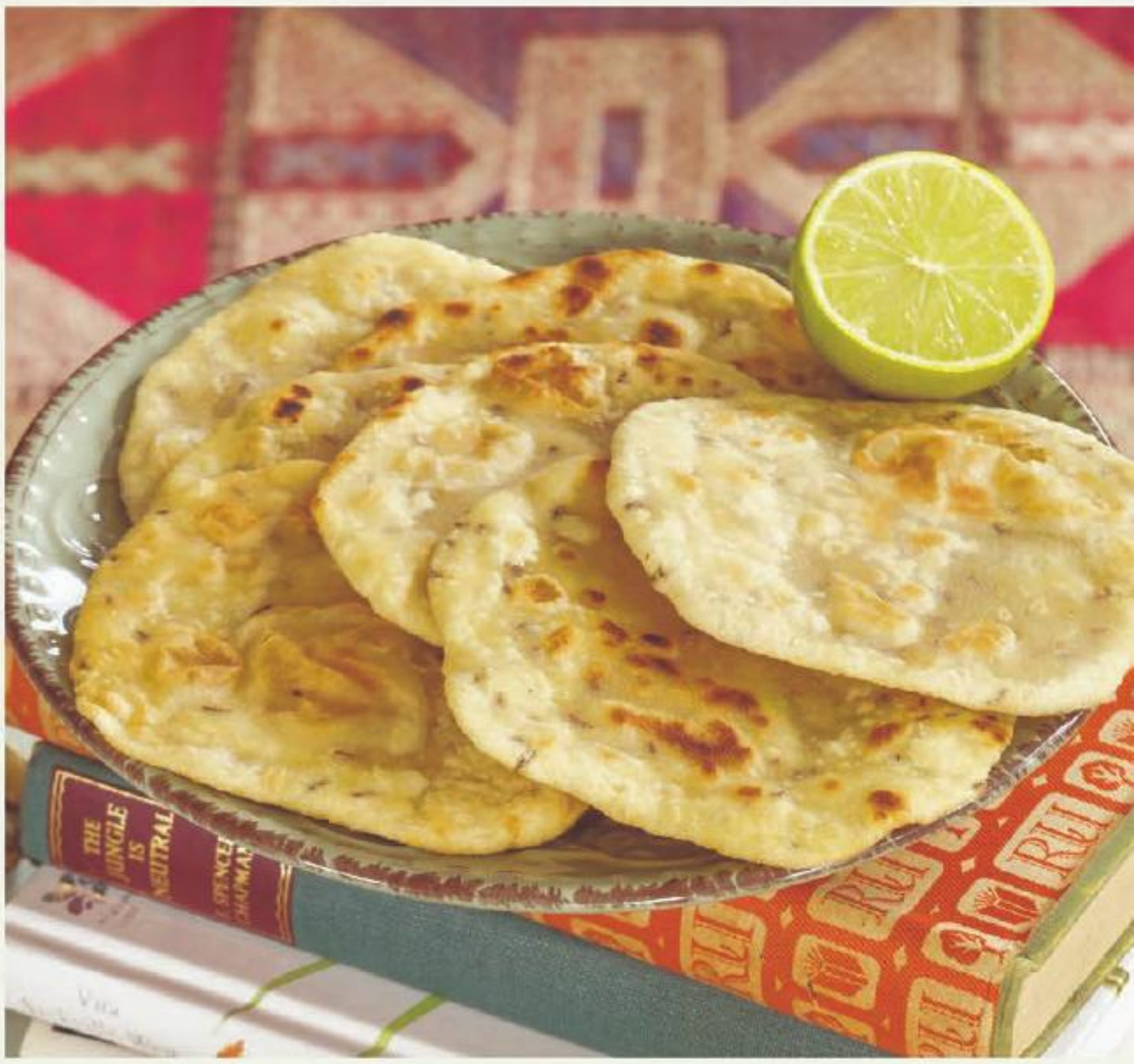
1. Wash lentils thoroughly until the water runs clean. Drain all water.

2. In a pan or skillet fry all the spices in ghee/butter on a low heat.

3. Pour in the drained lentils and stir the mixture well to stop it sticking to bottom of the pan.

4. Add the courgettes and continue stirring, then the tomatoes or tomato pulp, and carry on stirring until the liquid is absorbed. Add the water, cover the pot and simmer on low heat until all liquid is absorbed.

5. Garnish this with finely chopped fresh coriander leaves, and serve it with warm puris and mango chutney.



PURIS

INDIAN FLATBREAD

YOU WILL NEED:

½ kilo plain flour • ¾ cup fine semolina flour
caraway seeds, dry-fried in a skillet • vegetable oil for frying

1. Mix the flour and semolina in a large mixing bowl. Add water as needed to make firm dough, kneading until it is pliable. Cover it with a damp cloth and leave it to stand for 10 minutes.

2. Dampen two dishcloths, and spread one over a baking-sheet or table-top, close to the cooker.

3. Divide the dough into about 10 medium-sized balls. Cover these with the other damp cloth while you work. Press each ball into a disc about 4cm in diameter, placing these discs on the damp cloth and then covering them with the other damp cloth. Placing them between damp cloths will make them puff out when frying.

4. Pour oil into a saucepan to a depth of 3cm and heat it on a medium-high flame. To test the oil, put a little piece of dough in the oil. The oil is ready if the dough comes up right away and does not change colour.

5. Fry the puris in the order in which you made them. Press one puri lightly into the oil and when it puffs up, turn it over and put another puri in. Keep adding six to eight puris at a time. Fry them until they are slightly golden-brown all around, by turning them a few times. You may adjust the heat as necessary while frying.

6. Remove the puris from the oil with a slotted spoon, and put them on absorbent paper to soak off the excess oil. Serve immediately.

JASMINE RICE

SERVES **5** AS AN ACCOMPANIMENT

YOU WILL NEED:

100g basmati rice • 50g golden raisins
20g currants • 2 teaspoons ground cardamom

Boil water and add the rice, letting it cook for 10 minutes. Then drain it, but don't rinse it under cold water. Put it back in the pot and add the cardamom and raisins. Put on the lid and allow it to steam for a few minutes before serving, having first fluffed it up with a fork.

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T&F WARMING



SERVES 4

QUICK & EASY INDIAN COCONUT BURFI

YOU WILL NEED:

400g desiccated coconut
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 tin of sweetened condensed milk
1 tin of coconut cream
4 teaspoons cardamom powder
2 drops of rose essence (optional)
2 drops of food colouring of your choice (optional) - or use a pinch of saffron instead
crushed pistachios and almonds, to garnish

1. On medium heat, melt the butter and add the condensed milk and coconut cream. As soon as the milk stars to bubble, add the colouring, rose-essence and cardamom and give it a good stir.

2. Add the coconut a little at a time. Mix well from the edges to the centre to avoid burning.

3. Let it cook for a while and continue stirring until the mixture forms a soft ball in the centre. This indicates that it has cooked well.

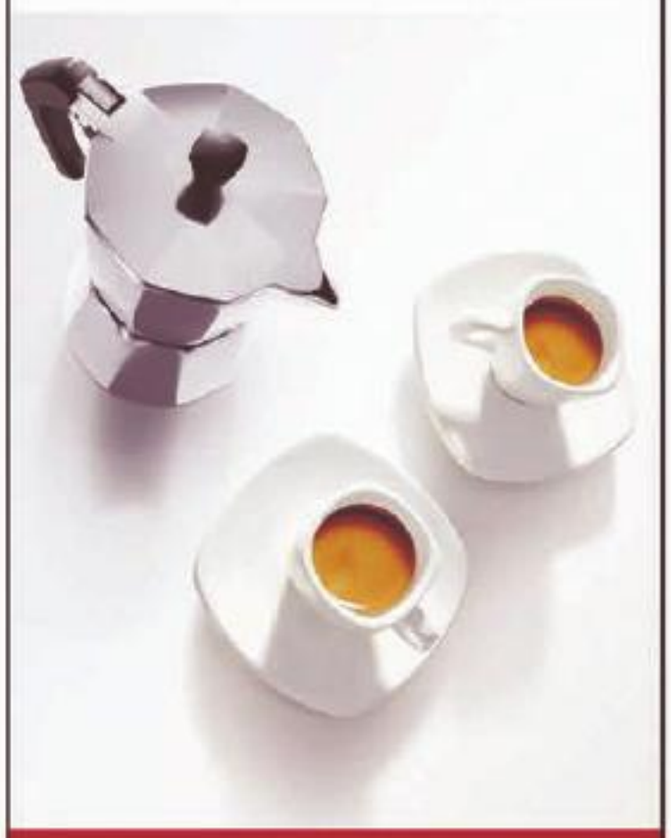
4. Prepare a shallow dish and grease it with butter, then pour the mixture into it, smoothing the surface with a spatula. Let it cool for about 25 minutes.

5. Cut it into diamond shapes and scatter these with crushed pistachios and almonds.

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GINGER

Ginger *(Zingibar officanale)* is part of the family Zingiberaceae, to which turmeric also belongs. It is grown commercially in India, China, Jamaica and Japan. It is the rhizome - the part that grows underground - which is used in cooking. It is dried and ground, preserved, made into a paste, or used freshly cut.

Ginger has been valued for its medicinal and flavouring properties for thousands of years, particularly in the Far East to which it is native. It was particularly sought after in Europe in medieval times, when it was an important addition to many foods, in cuisine that was largely influenced by that of the Middle East, during and after the Crusades. The rhizomes were easily transported as they lasted well.

Dried and ground ginger is popularly used in cakes and biscuits, especially around the winter festive season, but today fresh ginger is seeing resurgence in popularity as Middle Eastern and Asian cooking styles see wider use. You will now find ginger root on greengrocers' trucks whereas only a few years ago you would have to hunt it down at special shops.

A ginger infusion can give comfort when you are suffering from the effects of a cold or the flu. Pour boiling water onto one teaspoonful of grated fresh ginger, add the juice of half a lemon, and one teaspoonful of honey, and drink it warm.

If you want to freeze fresh ginger, you must first peel it. It is easily grated when frozen, so you can bring it out, grate as much as you need, and then return it to the freezer. If you let it sit in the fridge for too long, it will shrivel up – and you rarely get much use out of a whole rhizome unless you freeze it and keep it.



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Vegetables with SOUL

Eat more vegetables, they say – but it's difficult to work up interest in them at times. So we've asked for help. JAMES BARTOLO has come up with five ways to pique your interest.

Photography: George Scintilla/Styling: Daphne Caruana Galizia

James Bartolo is executive chef at the Radisson Golden Sands Resort & Spa

ROAST *aubergine* WITH SALSA

Serves 4 as a starter

YOU WILL NEED:

2 large aubergines • 50g pistachios
100g chopped tomato • 1 garlic clove, chopped
1 teaspoon chopped coriander • 100g goat's cheese
crushed pepper corns • olive oil • sea salt • black pepper

1. Cut the aubergines in half down the length and score the flesh in a criss- cross pattern. Brush them with olive oil, and sprinkle them with salt and black pepper. Place them on a baking tray, cut side up, and roast for about 30 minutes in a hot oven.

2. Mix all the other ingredients with 4 tablespoons of olive oil and some crushed peppercorns to make the salsa. Spoon this over the roast aubergines and serve.



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STUFFED SWEET *potatoes*

Serves 6 as a starter

YOU WILL NEED:

3 medium sweet potatoes • 200g chickpeas • salt
200g blackeye peas • 2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 tablespoon olive oil • 1small onion, peeled and diced
fresh coriander, chopped • 50g cream cheese • 100g mozzarella

1. Roast the sweet potatoes in a hot oven for 30 minutes, then take them out and let them cool. Meanwhile, sauté the onion, add the cumin, beans and chickpeas

2. When the potatoes are cool enough, cut them in half along the length and scoop the flesh into a large bowl. Add the cream cheese and a little salt, mash it all up, and stir in the beans mixture.

3. Use this to fill each potato skin and top with a slice of mozzarella, then grill until the mozzarella has melted. Serve immediately.

STIR-FRIED *Swiss chard* WITH RED PEPPERS

Serves 3 to 4 as a side dish



YOU WILL NEED:

400g Swiss chard, chopped • 100g sliced onion • 100g red pepper, sliced • 3 tablespoons sesame oil
4 tablespoons soya sauce • 1 tablespoon sesame seeds • 1 clove garlic, chopped

1. Heat a pan over high heat, then add the sesame oil, garlic, onion and red peppers and stir for 30 seconds. Put in the Swiss chard and fry for 2 minutes. Finish with the soy sauce and sesame seeds and serve.

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VEGETABLE *gratin*

Serves 4 as a side dish



YOU WILL NEED:

1 dark green courgette • 1 yellow courgette • 1 green courgette • 3 tomatoes fresh thyme • 2 garlic cloves, chopped • 100g Parmesan cheese • salt and pepper

1. Cut the vegetables diagonally, and put them in a large bowl. Drizzle with olive oil and add thyme leaves, salt and garlic.

2. Grease a baking-dish with butter, lay the vegetables in it, sprinkle them with the Parmesan and pepper, and bake in hot oven for about 30 minutes.

VEGETABLE *ribbons*

Serves 3 as a side dish



YOU WILL NEED:

1 carrot • 1 parsnip • 1 yellow courgette • 1 green courgette
50g butter • fresh herbs • salt and pepper

1. Trim off the ends of the vegetables. Using a peeler, make thin slices lengthwise – like ribbons.

2. Heat the butter in a pan and cook the garlic for a minute, then cook the vegetable ribbons, adding the chopped herbs, salt and pepper.



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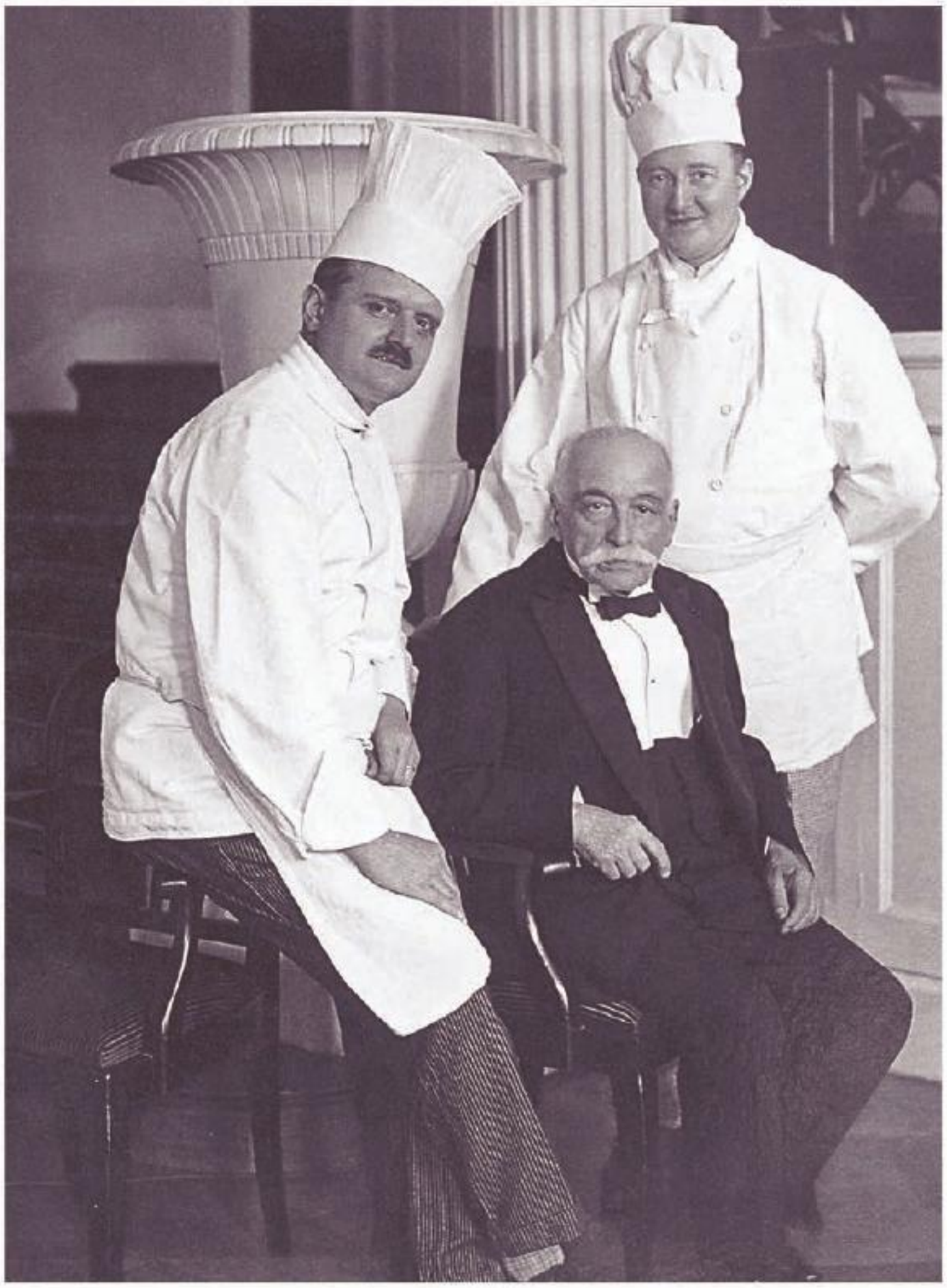
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Auguste Escoffier

Auguste Escoffier (1846-1935) came to be known as the 'chef of kings and the king of chefs'. He was born in the French Riviera town of Villeneuve-Loubet, and his career in cookery began when he was 12 and was made an apprentice at his uncle's restaurant in Nice. The year was 1858. When he was 19, Escoffier moved to Paris, taking on another apprenticeship, and it all followed from there.



Escoffier was the first great chef who worked directly for the public throughout his entire career. Prior to this, the great French chefs worked privately for royalty and the aristocracy, in the kitchens of palaces and mansions, as that other great chef, Carême, did - or in private clubs, as did Alexis Soyer. But Auguste Escoffier was never in private employ. From his apprenticeship in his uncle's restaurant in Nice to his collaborations with Cesar Ritz, who set up the famous hotel that remains the ultimate byword for glamour, Escoffier's talents were in the service of cooking and his customers. Among those customers were kings, heads of state, and many stars of the London and Paris Opera, who were guests at the famous hotels in which he worked, among them the Savoy and Carlton in London.

His fame was driven by his innovations in the aesthetics of gastronomy, and the revolutionary changes he made in upgrading the culinary arts. Before Escoffier's time, haute cuisine was a matter of excess and extravagance, with overly complicated recipes, fanciful dinners, and sauces and garnishes that disguised main ingredients nearly beyond recognition. But his innovative admonition was, *"above all, keep it simple"*.

Escoffier developed a new gastronomic philosophy, a sense of finely honed and highly refined simplicity in dining, ideals that have been espoused by the finest chefs since then. But it was not just about the aesthetics and the food itself. Escoffier also revolutionised restaurant and hotel kitchens, starting the systems which are still the basis for big kitchens today. It was he who created the 'brigade' system, eliminating the chaotic, unpleasant atmosphere that once reigned in large hotel and restaurant kitchens. Repulsed by the foul language and lack of concern for cleanliness which were typical of 19th-century kitchens, Escoffier laid down sanitation standards and instilled in his subordinates a real respect for the wholesomeness of the food they served.

He was one of the earliest chefs of note to have a sincere interest in preserving the nutritional value of the foods he prepared and served. He was fascinated by food science and was a pioneer in preservation and in developing sauces that could be bottled in the home.

Escoffier promoted the belief that food service professionals at all levels should be dedicated to improving their skills and general knowledge through education. He wrote numerous articles and books on cookery, the most famous of his works being Le Guide Culinaire and A Guide to Modern Cookery.

He died at 89, a few days after his wife did, in February 1935, at the Villa Fernand, their home in Monte Carlo.

www.escoffier-society.com

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cook up some fun





How to braise meat

Braising is a method of cooking meat slowly on a mirepoix – a thick bed of chopped, mixed vegetables – with some strong stock made from meat and bones *(see how to make this stock on page 59)*. You can use this method for joints of beef or for smaller pieces like rabbit.

The vegetables should be browned quickly in hot fat and stirred constantly to ensure even colouring, then transferred to a heavy pan or casserole. As the vegetables cook beneath the meat, they will disintegrate and help to thicken the stock.

Ideally, the meat should be fairly lean; any fat that melts during cooking should be skimmed off before serving. The meat can be marinated before braising it in this way, and very lean meat may also need to be larded. Brown the meat well all over to seal in the juices (just heat some oil in a frying-pan and flip the meat over in it) then place it on the vegetables in the casserole pot.

Pour in enough stock to just cover the meat. The stock should be of good quality and gelatinous. Put it into a preheated oven (around gas mark 4/180C) until the meat is half cooked.

Then remove the casserole from the oven (do not turn off the heat), take out the meat (use tongs) and set it aside. Strain the stock and discard the solids left behind in the strainer. Put the liquid into a clean saucepan and bubble it until it has reduced to a thick and syrupy consistency.

Put the meat into a clean roasting-tin, pour this gravy over it, and return it to the oven. Do not cover it, but turn it at intervals so that it does not dry out.

By the time the meat is ready to eat, the stock should be so reduced that it is thick and shiny and has a coating consistency, which means that it does not run off the meat when you spread it on. The meat will be soft and delicious.

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Claire's *birthday* cake

RECIPE, STYLING AND PHOTOGRAPHY: CLAIRE BORG



You will need 2 x 20cm-diameter and 2 x 12.5cm-diameter cake tins.

FOR THE CAKE, YOU WILL NEED:
450g plain flour • 150g Valhrona cocoa powder
600g sugar • 6 teaspoons baking powder
10 eggs • 600g butter – at room temperature

FOR THE GANACHE, YOU WILL NEED:
400g dark chocolate • 2 tablespoons butter • 200ml heavy cream

FOR THE RASPBERRY SAUCE, YOU WILL NEED:
300g frozen raspberries • 100g sugar
2 tablespoons gelatine granules

1. First, make the raspberry sauce. Cook together the sugar and raspberries until the raspberries defrost and the sugar melts (a few minutes). Sprinkle the gelatine onto about 4 tablespoons of water and leave to soak for a couple of minutes. Take the saucepan off the heat, stir the soaked gelatine into the cooked raspberries, stir until well dissolved and allow it to reach room temperature before refrigerating it.

2. Now make the ganache. In a bain-marie, melt together the butter, cream and chocolate. Let it cool before using it. The texture should be soft but not runny.

3. Preheat the oven to gas mark 4/180C. Grease all the tins with butter and scatter them with flour.

4. To make the actual cake, beat together the butter and sugar till light and fluffy. Add the eggs one by one, beating after each until evenly combined.

5. Sift the flour with the cocoa and the baking powder, then fold this into the eggs, butter and sugar mixture. Divide this batter evenly into the 4 tins. Bake the cakes for about 40 minutes, or until done - insert a skewer and it should come out clean. The smaller ones will probably be ready before the larger ones, though not necessarily. Remove the cakes from the oven as soon as they are done, but do not remove them from the tin until they have cooled completely.

6. Once the cakes are out of the tins, slice them across the width (like a sandwich) and if the tops are not flat, slice off a thin layer so that you have a flat surface.

7. You now have 8 pieces of cake to layer as you wish with chocolate ganache, whipped cream, raspberry sauce, Maltesers, fresh raspberries and red currants. Don't put cream in the bottom layers, though. You need to fill the first base layers with something that can hold the weight of the layers above it. So keep the cream and fruit for the upper layers.



Giovanni Rana

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Beef consommé

Simple beef consommé is a welcome respite from rich food, and a good way to warm up a cold night. Buy two kilos of beef shin or shank and ask the butcher for some bones, which he will cut up for you. You need the bones in pieces because that will get the marrow out into the broth, and it's the marrow you want.

Put the meat and bones into a large pot with a lid and fill it with water at room temperature. Use bottled water if your tap-water has a strong taste. Bring it to the boil and using a metal spoon, remove the scum that forms on the surface. Add a little salt – not too much, you can always adjust it before the soup is served.

After it has been boiling for a little while, turn the heat right down to a simmer, and put in four large carrots (washed), 1 large kohlrabi (cut in two, peel left on), 1 parsnip (washed), 1 leek (wash it and trim off the roots, but you can leave the leaves), some celery, 1 onion (peeled), 1 garlic clove (peeled), a sprig of thyme and a bay leaf.

Simmer very slowly on a low flame, so that the boiling is barely perceptible. Carry on for four hours, adding more water if necessary, so that you have a good, rich stock. Use a slotted spoon and thongs to lift out the meat, bones and vegetables, then drain the liquid into a bowl through a strainer. Let it reach room temperature, pour it into a plastic box with a lid, then refrigerate it.

When it has chilled, you will see a layer of yellowy-white fat that has formed on the surface. Remove this and discard it.

Serve the consommé in a mug if you are alone as a warming drink, or serve it as a starter at lunch or supper, after simmering finely diced carrots, potatoes and onion in it. Season it with salt and black pepper.

You can also use this basic meat stock in the preparation of other meals – for example, as the basis for soups, or simmer small pasta or tortellini in it. For adults only, add a tot of Madeira, Marsala, port or sherry to each portion, if liked.



Truffles



The truffle is a subterranean fungus which lives in symbiosis with certain trees - oak, chestnut, hazel and beech – growing in chalky soil or clay, in places where there is plenty of water and rainfall. It is black, dark brown, grey or whitish, and its shape is roundish but irregular. Truffles are found quite near the surface of the soil, and are generally 'truffled out' by dogs or, in the past, pigs.

Deforestation and pesticides have made truffles in France and Italy much rarer than they used to be. Before 1914, around 1740 tonns of truffles were harvested in the French Perigord region alone. Now less than 200 tons are found in the whole of France. Truffle cultivation has not yet yielded reliable results, because they can neither be sown nor planted. They spring up spontaneously from spores that encounter the roots of a symbiotic tree. And that is the main reason the price is so high: rarity value.

Alexandre Dumas wrote of truffles, in the 19th century, "They can, on certain occasions, make women more tender and men more lovable". The Roman writer Plutarch thought they were created by lightning as it struck the earth – a not entirely unreasonable assumption given that forked lightning tends to strike at trees. In the Middle Ages (typically) they were seen as a manifestation of the devil, and so fell into oblivion. They returned to the fore as a delicacy under Louis XIV of France and have remained sought after ever since.

The practice of using muzzled pigs to seek out truffles was common in the 17th century, but was then superseded by dogs which, unlike pigs, can be trained to obey commands, while having a highly refined sense of smell. One anecdotist wrote: "There are dogs that can seek them out as well as pigs. Some peasants, in areas where truffles can be found, have taught themselves through long experience to recognise the places where they are hidden". Dog-handlers pull the truffles out of the earth as soon as the dog begins to root at the ground, and then replace the clods of earth carefully so that any remaining truffles may mature.

One writer observed, *"There are two types of people who eat truffles: those who think truffles are good because they are dear, and those who know they are dear because they are good."* The real reason they are dear, of course, is that they are hard to find and troublesome to collect. As the French novelist Colette so aptly remarked of the fungus she called *"the gem of poor lands"*: *"You pay its weight in gold for it, then in most cases you put it to some paltry use. You smear it with foie gras; you bury it in poultry overloaded with fat; you chop it up and drown it in brown sauce; you mix it with vegetables covered in mayonnaise...to hell with thin slices, strips, trimmings and peelings of truffles! Is it not possible to like them for themselves?"*

The true connoisseur enjoys truffles whole and fresh, either raw with butter or salad, or cooked in embers, braised with white wine or champagne, or in a puff-pastry case – and a frugal way to eat slivers is grated over plainly cooked pasta.

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Tuscan treasures

MICHAEL DIACONO, chef patron at Giuseppi's in Mellieha and Rubino in Valletta, has delved into his notes for some of the most enticing and simple dishes of Tuscany. You'll love them.

Photography: George Scintilla • Styling: Daphne Caruana Galizia





Fagioli e gamberi

BEAN AND PRAWN SALAD

Serves 4 to 6 as a starter

YOU WILL NEED:

400g large prawns, steamed and peeled
200g dried cannellini beans
1 tomato, peeled, deseeded and diced
4 tablespoons olive oil • 1 fresh bay leaf
1 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
1 clove garlic, whole
a handful of basil leaves, torn
a few mint leaves • salt and pepper

1. Soak the beans overnight in plenty of water. Drain them and put them in a large pot. Fill the pot with water and add 1 garlic clove and the bay leaf. Bring this to the boil, then immediately turn the heat down and let it simmer for about 60 minutes. The beans should be tender but still with a bit of bite to them. Drain them as soon as they are cooked, or they will carry on cooking in the hot water.
2. Put the beans in a bowl. Gently stir in the tomato, then the olive oil, chopped garlic, herbs, salt and pepper.
3. Finally, stir in the peeled prawns. Serve as a starter with Maltese bread.



Crostini Toscani

CHICKEN LIVER PATE ON TOAST

Serves 6

YOU WILL NEED:

1 small onion, finely chopped • 50g butter
350g chicken livers, roughly chopped
1 tablespoon capers, chopped • 2 to 4 anchovy fillets
4 tablespoons dry white wine
6 slices baguette, cut diagonally • salt and pepper

1. Fry the onion in butter and when it begins to colour, add the chicken livers. Cook this gently for about 5 minutes, then add salt and pepper and the capers and anchovies.
2. Pour in the wine and let it cook until the mixture has thickened. Blend this but do not over process it. You want it with some texture. Serve on the toasted baguette.









Paccheri con ragu di cinghiale

PACCHERI PASTA WITH WILD BOAR SAUCE

Serves 6

YOU WILL NEED:

800g wild boar shoulder, cubed
500g paccheri pasta • 4 cloves of garlic
2 carrots, peeled and diced
2 onions, finely chopped
1 tablespoon thick tomato puree/kunserva
1 tablespoon bitter cocoa powder
6 juniper berries, lightly crushed
50g dried porcini mushrooms
½ bottle dry red wine, like Chianti
5 bay leaves • 3 sprigs fresh thyme
olive oil • salt and pepper

1. Heat some olive oil in a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan. Cook the garlic for a minute, then put in the carrots and onions.
2. Stir and cook for 5 minutes then add the meat. Season with salt and pepper, and fry for another 10 minutes until the meat is lightly browned.
3. Stir in the tomato puree/kunserva, then the cocoa, juniper berries and dried mushrooms, and after that, the wine and herbs. Mix well, bring to the boil, then immediately turn the heat right down. Let the pan simmer very gently for 1 hour until the meat is tender. Should the sauce dry out slightly, top up with home-made stock or water.
4. If you are going to use the sauce later, refrigerate it. Just before you are ready to serve it, boil the pasta till al dente in salted water then serve tossed with the ragu.



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Pappa al Pomodoro

BREAD AND TOMATO SOUP

Serves 6 to 8

YOU WILL NEED:

225g stale Maltese bread, without crusts
4 tablespoons olive oil
2 cloves garlic, chopped
2.5cm root ginger, peeled and crushed
1 teaspoon thick tomato puree
800g ripe tomatoes, peeled, deseeded and chopped
8 large basil leaves, roughly cut
1.5 litres home-made chicken/ vegetable stock
salt and pepper

1. Toast the bread lightly in a moderate oven so that it does not colour.
2. Put a little olive oil in a pan and gently fry the garlic and ginger for a few minutes. Add the tomato puree and cook for a minute longer. Now put in the tomatoes and basil, cook for 5 minutes and pour in the stock, sprinkling it with salt and pepper.
3. Stir well, bring to the boil, then turn the heat right down, add the toast and let it all simmer gently, while you stir from time to time, until the bread is reduced to a mush.
4. Serve the soup drizzled with olive oil and garnished with basil.

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Triglie alla livornese

LIVORNO-STYLE RED MULLET

Calculate 2 or 3 fish per person, depending on the size.

YOU WILL NEED:

6 red mullets, cleaned and descaled
80ml extra virgin olive oil
2 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
1 small celery stick, finely chopped
400g tomatoes, peeled, deseeded and chopped
a generous handful of parsley, chopped
salt and pepper

1. Heat the olive oil in a large frying-pan. Add the garlic and celery and stir-fry for a minute or two.
2. Put in some chopped parsley and then the tomatoes. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, then simmer for 5 minutes before adding the whole fish. Cover the pan and cook for 5 minutes.
3. Serve the fish sprinkled with parsley and olive oil.
4. An alternative method is to prepare the sauce as described above, then coat the fish with seasoned flour and fry them for 2 to 3 minutes on each side, serving them immediately with the sauce.







Torta di carciofi alla Toscana

TUSCAN-STYLE GLOBE ARTICHOKES

Serves 6

YOU WILL NEED:

6 freshly picked globe artichokes • 2 tablespoons plain flour
30g butter • 6 eggs • 4 tablespoons milk • 6 sage leaves
1 tablespoon grated pecorino • salt and pepper

1. Trim the artichokes and cut them into halves. Remove any choke (stringy bits in the heart) then boil in salted water for 15 minutes. Drain and leave to cool.

2. Preheat oven to gas mark 5/190C. Butter a round, shallow oven-proof dish.

3. Add salt and pepper to the flour and use this to coat the artichokes, then place them in the prepared dish.

4. Mix the eggs with salt, pepper, milk and sage. Add the pecorino, then pour this all over the artichokes.

5. Bake them for 20 minutes until golden and puffed up.



Almond milk

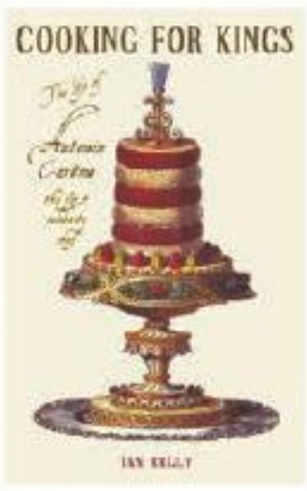
Almond milk, which is naturally sweet, played a leading role in the medieval European kitchen, and therefore played its part in consolidating the continent's sweet tooth. This is a strange-sounding liquid: how does one milk an almond? The answer is: the almonds are ground down into a pulp, a little water is added and the mixture is filtered. Almond milk sweetens and thickens, and glistens as it goes. It was so common in medieval cuisine as to be almost a staple ingredient, and was called for more often than cow's milk. As the cool drink *horchata*, it is sold today in bars in the almond lands around Valencia and across Spain, although the main ingredient today is the sweet tuber called chufa. Echoing Arab precedent, almond milk was used for chicken and lamb dishes especially, as well as sweet puddings such as the popular standby called frumenty, made of grain, almond milk and sometimes egg and saffron.

Anton Carême



Freezing his hand first in iced water, Antonin then plunged it straight into the boiling sugar, and back into the cold. A kitchen-boy gasped – Carême's patissier trick never failed to impress. The sugar moved like soft wax between his fingers – it was not yet ready and would have to stay on the heat. To be soft like this it had been boiling at 121 degrees but needed to be hotter still in order to 'crack' and spin. A few minutes passed and Antonin again plunged his hand first into freezing water and then molten sugar, and smiled.

Next he took the sharpest knife that hung from his belt, dipped it into the top of the sugar-lava and then into the cup of water. He brought it straight out, cracking the crystalline sugar clean from the knife. He turned round to Jay and the others who had stopped work to watch. The master chef, knowing his audience was in the palm of his sugared hand, allowed himself his quizzical half-smile and announced to the kitchen in his thick Parisian accent, 'Cassé'. The sugar was cracked and ready to spin.



From 'Cooking for Kings: The Life of Antonin Careme, the First Celebrity Chef' by Ian Kelly (2003)



Chopping onions

Your eyes water and your nose runs when you chop onions because the cutting breaks down the cell walls, releasing enzymes. These break down other substances released from the same cells, some of which – amino acid sulphoxides – form a volatile gas. When this reaches your eyes, it irritates the nerve endings, so your brain tells the tear ducts to produce water to dilute the irritation. A good solution is to keep your onions in the refrigerator. Cooling alters the compounds and reduces the amount of gas produced during chopping. It really does work.

Kellogg's cornflakes

William Keith Kellogg (1860-1951) was born in Michigan in the United States of America. His brother was the director of a hospital specialised in nutritional disorders, and he was his assistant. In 1894, Kellogg discovered a process for making flakes out of maize (corn). These could be eaten as part of the vegetarian diet recommended by the sect of the Seventh Day Adventists, to which both Kellogg brothers belonged. Kellogg's cornflakes were born. The cornflake-making process was industrialised four years later, and commercial marketing began in 1906. Cornflakes went on to become the world's most famous breakfast cereal.



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Turkish delight

The best Turkish delight in the world can be found among the stalls of the Egyptian Bazaar (not the better-known Grand Bazaar) in Istanbul. It is as light as a feather, and soft and bouncy on the tongue rather than gooey and creamy. The secret is freshness, above all, plus the quality and delicacy of the flavouring ingredients. The perishability of this temperamental sweetmeat is the bane in the lives of Turkish delight manufacturers: to be packaged and sold for export, the Turkish delight must be firm and chewy, and both are considered undesirable attributes.

Lokum raat (which gives us the Maltese word for the sweet) means "throat's ease" in Turkish. It was probably originally conceived as a soothing treatment for sore throats and coughs. Specific names and dates are often erroneously associated with the invention of particular sweets, not least for commercial reasons, and in the case of Turkish delight the name of the supposed inventor is Hadji Bekir of Constantinople, whose 'original' secret recipe, passed down the generations, is still followed by one Istanbul manufacturer. As *lokum* or *rahat*, Turkish delight is made all over the Middle East, Russia and the Balkans, and it is hugely popular in Greece, served with strong black coffee at the end of dinner.

Luncheon meat

Canned luncheon meat is a firm favourite with Maltese shoppers, and most of us think that it's a British invention. It isn't. In England it is known as spam, which was the original brand name. Spam canned meat was devised in Austin, Minnesota in 1937, by one Jay C. Hormel. Austin is now known as Spamtown, and it even has a Spam Museum.

Luncheon meat/spamis made of pork shoulder and ham. It is eaten in more than 100 countries, and five billion cans of it have been sold – and presumably, consumed – since 1937. The manufacturers of luncheon meat sold under the Spam brand have spent millions on communications campaigns, in a strenuous attempt at trying to reclaim their brand name from its abusive association with junk email.

The original use of luncheon meat was to keep soldiers provisioned with protein, which is how it came to be popular in Malta when the island was a British military base. Yet it's clearly not just soldiers who eat it worldwide. UK sales are in the millions every year, and luncheon meat is treated as a delicacy in Korea, alongside dog.

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Mortlach Scotch whisky



The Mortlach distillery lies in Speyside's spiritual heartland, Dufftown, and holds the honour of being the first legal distillery to be built there. It was founded in 1823 - the year of the Excise Act - by James Findlater and, a year later, Donald Macintosh and Alexander Gordon joined him in ownership. Mortlach proffers a classic Speyside flavour, though the set-up is far from typical; there are three wash stills and three spirit stills with a combined total capacity of 2.91 million litres annually.

Over the years, various distillery managers have altered the shape and design, something rather unheard of in Scotch whisky production. Mortlach has five onsite warehouses with space for 21,000 casks. In 1831, the distillery was acquired by John Robertson for £270 and was sold a year later to A & T Gregory. In 1837, Aberlour's Grant brothers, John and James, acquired the distillery, dismantling the equipment for use at the 1840-built Glen Grant distillery. The Mortlach distillery lay silent.

John Alexander Gordon joined the brothers in 1842 and it was not until almost a decade later that Mortlach distilled once more. Whilst the stills enjoyed their proverbial sabbatical, the site was used not only as a brewery but also, rather curiously, as a church. When production resumed in 1851 the whisky was sold as The Real John Gordon.

After playing a role in the shaping of the railway industry in the 19th century, the entrepreneurial Scottish civil engineer George Cowie applied his pioneering and precise approach to engineering another great challenge, the production of single malt Scotch whisky. He accepted a partnership at the Mortlach distillery in 1852, before becoming sole owner in 1867 when John Alexander Gordon died. In 1895, George Cowie's son, George Cowie Jr, joined the company. Two years later, right before the turn of the century, the distillery invested in increasing its capacity, doubling the number of stills from three to six. The distillery passed down from George Cowie Jr to his son, Alexander Cowie, who eventually sold the distillery to John Walker and Sons in 1923. Two years later, they in turn became part of Distillers Company Limited, and subsequently Scottish Malt Distillers and then Diageo.

Mortlach is well known for their use of quality sherry casks during maturation but also for their rich robust spirit. This is produced in one of the most idiosyncratic stillrooms in the whisky industry. There are only six stills but each one is a different shape and size, as each was added on at different times. One is named 'Wee Witchie' and spirit that passes through it is distilled three times, compared to the regular two times elsewhere in Scotland and also in the other stills at Mortlach.



Mortlach Whisky is distributed by M.Demajo (Wines & Spirits) Ltd., 103 Archbishop Street, Valletta. Tel: 2552 0000 www.demajowinesandspirits.com

TEA *NOTES*

Tea is naturally rich in antioxidants called flavonoids, also found in fruit and vegetables. It is also a natural source of fluoride and of manganese.

The amount of caffeine consumed with an intake of three or four cups of tea every day is well within safe levels. There are no calories in tea taken without milk or sugar.

The custom of afternoon tea was not devised by the English; they adopted it from the continent. It was first spread by the 7th Duchess of Bedford, who realized that the gap between lunch and dinner was far too long and had to be broken somehow. At five o' clock, she served tea to her friends, with sandwiches and small cakes. The practice was picked up by other hostesses, and that was that. With the British version of the tea ceremony, it was the hostess who poured, and not the maid, who only brought the pot into the room and then cleared away.



Earl Grey tea is black unsteamed China tea to which oil of bergamot is added. It is named after the 2nd Earl Grey, for whom it was created.

You can make sorbet using 300g of sugar for every litre of tea. Green tea flavoured with jasmine essence gives excellent results.

The first British tea shop, now a national institution, was the idea of an enterprising shop-girl who, in 1864, persuaded her bosses to allow her to serve tea and cakes to her tired lady customers. Word spread, and the shop was besieged by people who loved the service. Before long, the tea and cakes were no longer a side-line service but the main event, and the tea shop was born. Tea shops were different to the coffee houses of earlier years: it was acceptable for ladies to be seen in them, even unaccompanied by gentlemen. By the late 1800s, grand hotels, like the Ritz in London and the Plaza in New York City, were fitting out special tea-rooms and these were packed with society's best every afternoon.

Green tea is the most natural and fragrant type of tea. It undergoes no fermentation process and so keeps its colour. It has very little caffeine and has been associated with protection against certain cancers. To make a cup of green tea, use (bottled) water that is two minutes off the boil, leave the tea to infuse for two to four minutes and don't add milk or sugar. Over-brewing may give a bitter taste.

The Chinese brewed their tea in the kettle, but the English preferred to brew it in a pot. This spurred on the pottery industry, and led to the devising of tea-pots by Josiah Wedgwood and others. Wedgwood built his business on supplying fine tea-drinking accoutrements.

HOW TO USE TEA LEAVES

Don't use tap water – use pure water only. Rinse out the tea-pot with boiling water before putting in the tea leaves. Use one teaspoonful of tea for each person, and 'one for the pot'. You can never compensate for insufficient tea leaves by leaving them to infuse for longer; this just stews the tea. Pour the water into the pot just as it reaches boiling-point. Leave to infuse for three minutes; any longer and the tannins will spread, making the infusion bitter and darker, which is called stewing. Use a spoon to stir the tea in the pot just before pouring it through a tea-strainer.

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Cinzano 1757



Cinzano Vermouth is one of the most iconic names in the drinks industry, producing some of the finest Italian vermouths for more than 250 years. Now Cinzano has launched its Cinzano 1757 range of three small-batch, handcrafted vermouths. These premium vermouths have been bottled to celebrate Cinzano's founding fathers, Giovanni Giacomo and Carlo Stefano, who in 1757 started their business in Turin.



Cinzano vermouth was created by Giovani Cinzano in 1757, a combination of Italian red or white wines, sugar, alcohol, and a closely guarded combination of herbaceous and floral elements: coriander, orange peel, juniper, cloves, nutmeg, and even absinthe. What became known as the «vermouth of Turin» proved popular with the haute bourgeoisie of that city and, later, Casanova. Exports began in the 1890s: to Argentina, Brazil and the USA, among others. In Paris in 1912, Cinzano was the first product to be advertised with a neon sign.

Cinzano Extra Dry Vermouth is perfect for making martinis and other classic cocktails. Cinzano Bianco is designed to be the primary spirit in the cocktail or drunk neat on the rocks. Cinzano Rosso is a sweet vermouth with a great flavour profile that goes into a great many of the classic and pre-Prohibition style cocktails being made today.

Cinzano Bianco: A fragrant, full-bodied flavour profile and nose, with a mild note of herbaceous finish on the palate. The Bianco is a bit sweeter than the dry and offers great versatility.

Cinzano Rosso: Filled with deep red fruit notes combined with mild herbaceous notes, the flavour profile offers a perfect balance of herbs and spices with sweetness. The Rosso expression is a great addition to traditional cocktails such as the Old Fashioned or even more contemporary cocktails.

Cinzano Extra Dry: A traditional, dry flavour profile combining the essence of the white grape base with very distinctive floral notes and light citrus. It is ideal for traditional dry martini recipes, and a good base for many dry cocktails.









Cinzano 1757

The new Cinzano Vermouth "1757" range is a small batch production in numbered bottles, handcrafted and gently infused with the finest mature blend of aromatics. It is intensely rich with a velvet bitter finish. Its balanced full-bodied flavours enrich and enhance the most famous classic Vermouth Rosso based cocktails such as the Negroni and the Americano.

Cinzano 1757 Dry has predominant salty characters with some bright citrus flavours and a drying bitter background, all wrapped up in a big herbal bow with plenty of rosemary.

The 1757 Bianco, meanwhile, has a more contemporary profile, with predominant elderflower characters underpinned with bitter wormwood and cinchona bark to balance the sweetness. Serve this over ice with soda water and lemon zest.

The 1757 Rosso is like the original Cinzano Rosso, but 'with bigger shoulders'. It is light-bodied and inherently bitter with bitter cherry, orange and a cooling menthol and anise character.

The Cinzano 1757 range is excellent for classic cocktails like the Negroni, Americano and Martini.



Negroni

¾ fl oz Campari
¾ fl oz Cinzano Rosso Vermouth
1/3 fl oz gin

Pour all the ingredients into a tumbler with some ice. Garnish with a slice of orange.

Martini

½oz Cinzano Dry Vermouth
3oz gin • lemon peel
ice • 1 olive

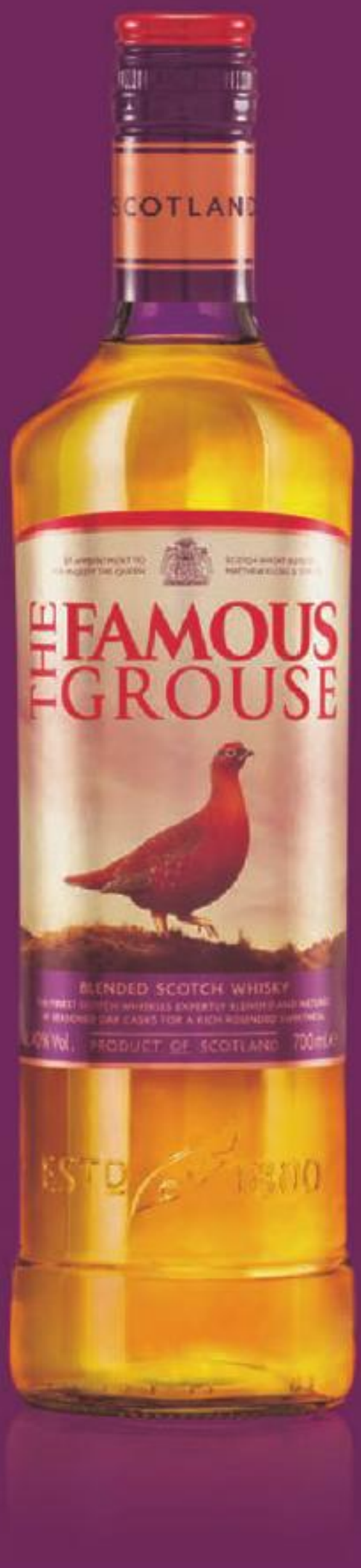
Pour the gin and vermouth into a mixing-glass with ice cubes. Stir well. Strain into a chilled martini cocktail glass. Squeeze oil from lemon peel onto the drink, or garnish with olive.

Americano

1oz Campari
1oz Cinzano Rosso Vermouth
Soda to top up

Prepare directly on ice in a rock glass. Garnish with an orange slice or rind.

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VERMOUTH AND SHERRY COCKTAILS

RODNEY PISANI of the Maltese Bartenders Guild mixes some cocktails in the emerging trend for vermouth and sherry.

Photography: George Scintilla

Styling: Daphne Caruana Galizia

ROB ROY

5cl Famous Grouse Scotch whisky
1cl sweet vermouth
1 dash Angostura Bitters

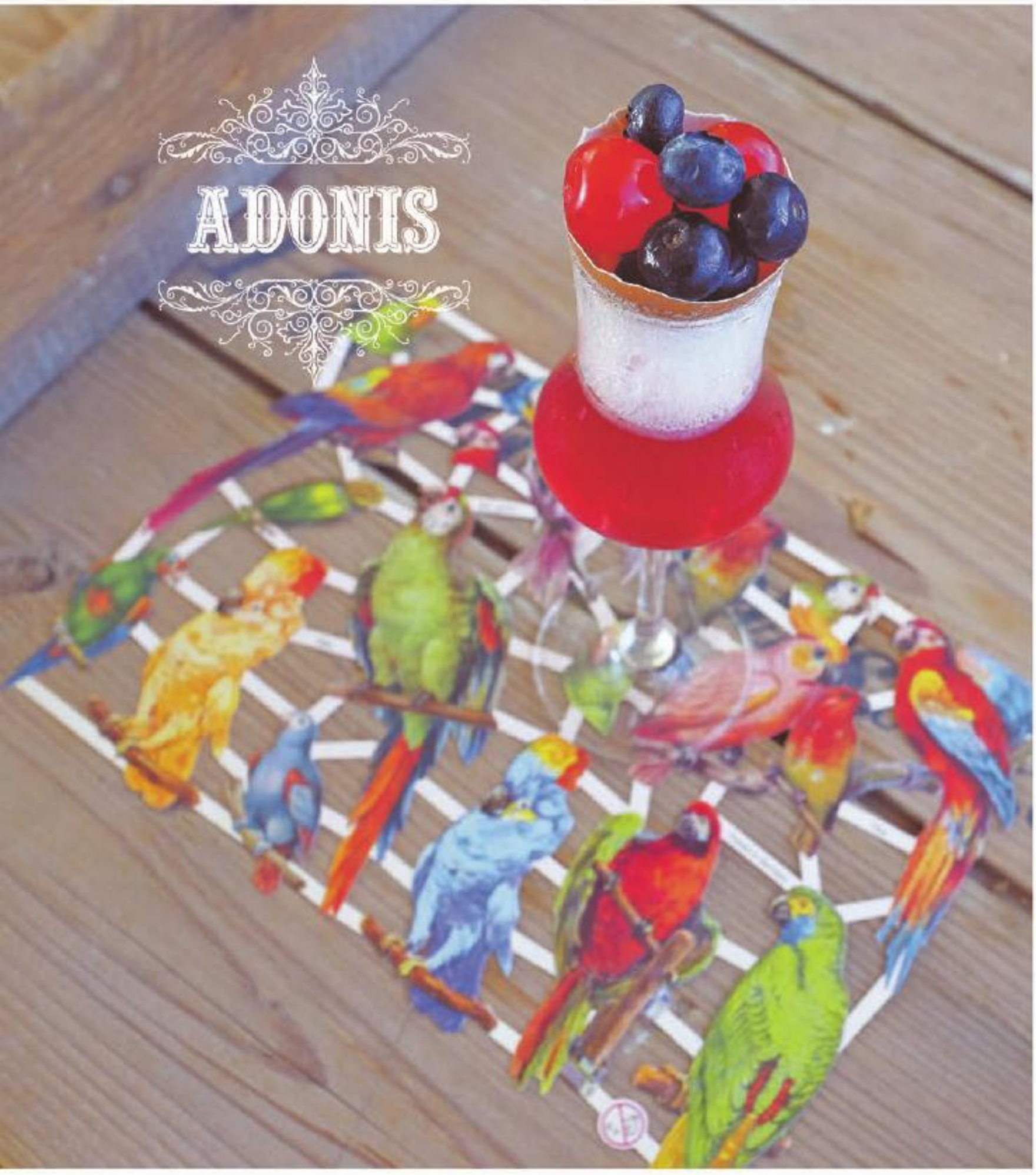
Shake all together and fine-strain into a martini glass.


VERMOUTH
PANACHE
6cl dry vermouth
2cl sweet vermouth
a dash of Angostura Bitters
grapefruit juice
Build in (which means pouring in the drinks one after the other) over crushed ice in a rounded beer mug, and 'float' a little grapefruit juice on top.

HARRY HARVEY'S PUNCH

3cl sweet vermouth • 3cl dry vermouth
3cl De Kuyper cherry brandy • seasonal fresh fruit • soda water

Pour each drink into a pitcher glass (called 'building'), top up with soda and garnish with fresh fruit



2cl dry sherry • 1cl sweet vermouth
1cl De Kuyper Triple Sec • 1 dash orange bitters
2 egg-whites • 2cl apple juice

Dry-shake the ingredients and pour into a large sherry glass. To dry-shake a cocktail simply means to shake the liquid ingredients together with no ice. All cocktail recipes that involve egg-whites (used to create the foaminess) start with a vigorous dry-shake that lasts at least 15 seconds. This ensures that the egg-white incorporates with the other ingredients, and froths up.





5cl sweet sherry
2cl simple syrup
3 oranges
1 dash of aromatic bitters

Shake the ingredients together and strained them over crushed ice in a glass or copper mug.

FACEBOOK: Maltese Bartenders Guild

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THE COFFEE-TABLE BOOK

SACHA STAPLES

Interiors photography: Selva/Philipp Selva at Grey & Adler

A coffee-table book is designed to be as much a decorative object in your home as it is something to read and look through. And that's why these books came to have that name: they're large and decorative and tended to be stacked flat on sofa-tables. They also tend to reveal a little about their owners. Next time you are a guest at a friend's home, take note of their collection and you might learn something. It might reaffirm that this person is in fact an interior design aficionado, evident by the presence of Kelly Wearstler's *Modern Glamour*, *Paris in Colour*, or perhaps Taschen's *100 Interiors Around the World*. Or you might learn that your friend is a closet punk rock enthusiast, or an admirer of heartfelt slices-of-life, indicative of the *Humans of New York* collection.

Characterised by large-scale photography, the modern coffee-table book was first introduced in the 1960s by the Sierra Club, an American environmental organisation. In the interest of raising awareness of the natural beauty of the world, and inspire its protection, the Sierra Club launched a series of books featuring nature photography, which included pictures by noted photographers like Ansel Adams. The books were designed to have a page large enough to carry dynamic images which required the eye to move within the boundaries rather than encompassing it all in one glance, as the Sierra Club's then executive director, David Brower, explained.

Although we do not often think of curling up with a coffee-table book in the same way that we would with the latest bestseller, doing so is a splendid experience. With such beautiful and strong imagery, expansive pages and glossy finish, the coffee-table book is a momentary escape into a dream world of glorious aesthetics. Perhaps in a way they are the grown-up version of storybooks and fairytales for children. A coffee-table book often demands less thought, but inspires more dreaming wonder; it allows you to sit back and enjoy the pictures as you would have as a child.

The German art book publishing house, Taschen, which was founded by Benedikt Taschen in Cologne in 1980, has since become the best-known publisher of these beautiful books on all manner of visual subjects. Focusing on the evocative power of the image, Taschen's repertoire includes collections of visual artists, ranging from the old masters to contemporary, travel photography, films, music, pop culture, fairy tales, architecture and interiors, botanical drawings, and a great deal more. There is even a book featuring photographs of the insides of top chefs' fridges, and it is absolutely entertaining.

A coffee table book is a declaration of one's wishes and desires – a marker of taste. As books go, the ones for your coffee-table come with a hefty price tag and are therefore an investment piece. They are the books you hold on to, unlike inexpensive paperback novels, which inevitably run the risk of ending up in the bag destined for the charity shop. Large, heavily illustrated books make for wonderful presents and with such beautiful images, they can be enjoyed over time.





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BOOK

Kay Nielsen: East of the Sun and West of the Moon

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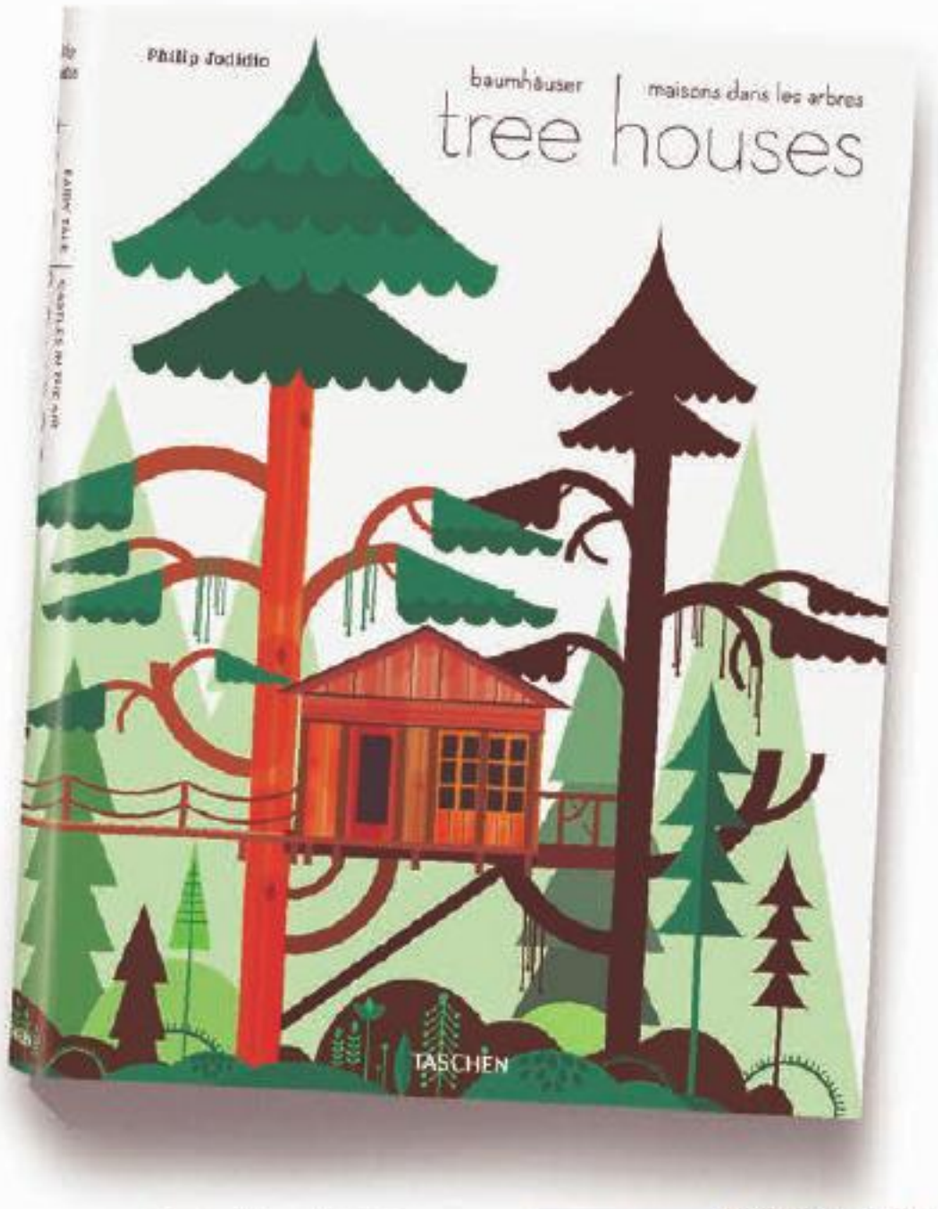
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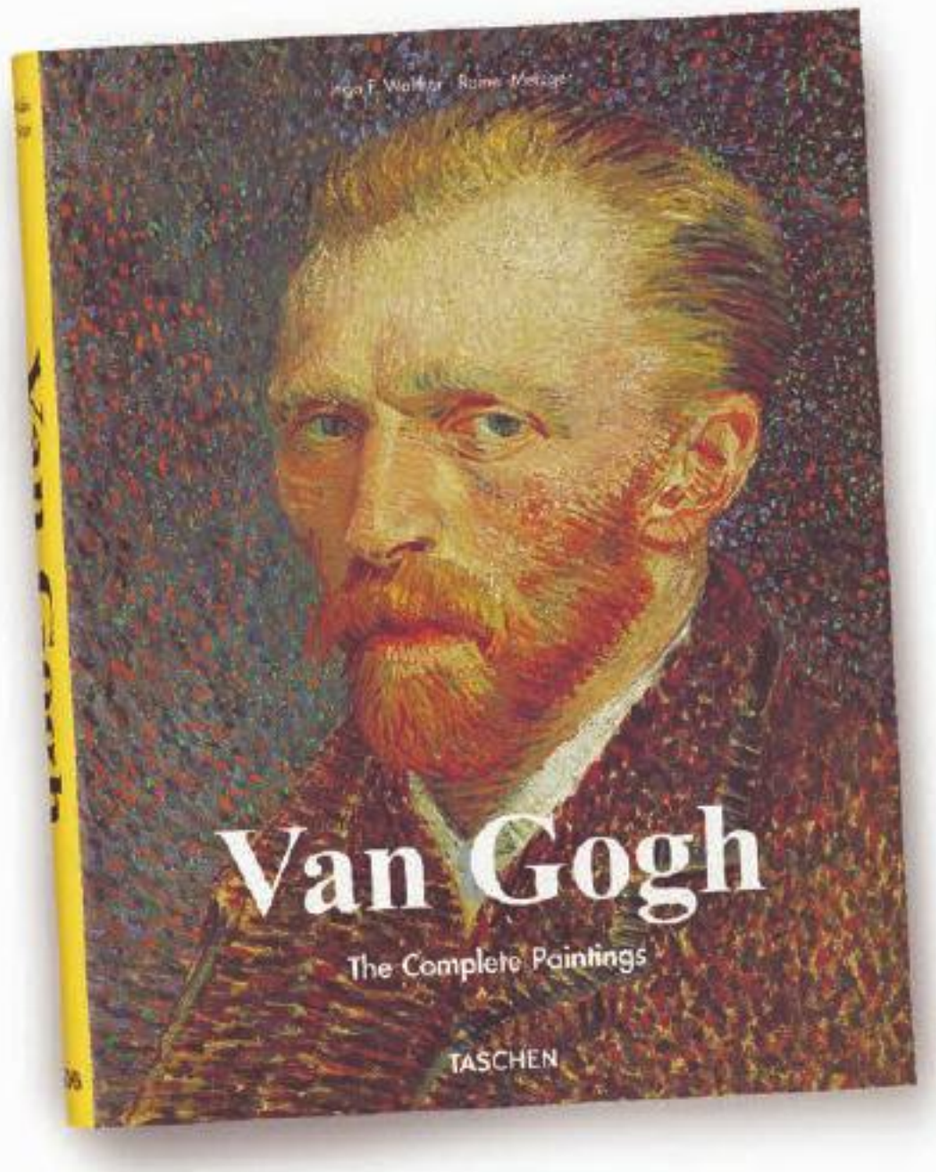
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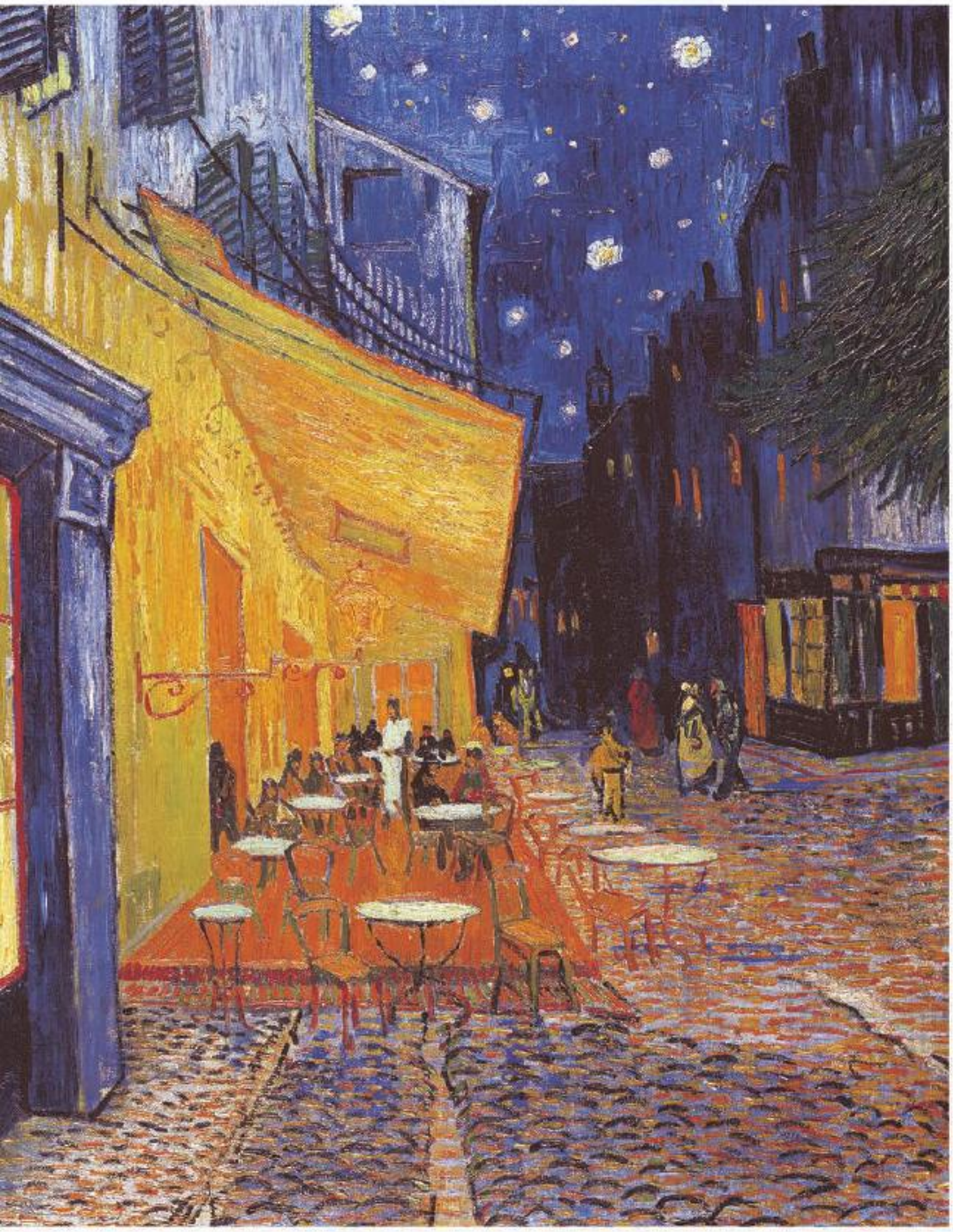
Philip Jodidio: Tree Houses: Fairy Tale Castles in the Air

The idea of climbing a tree for shelter, or just to see the earth from another perspective, is surely as old as humanity. Tree houses are chronicled in ancient civilisations and their lore crosses through the history of every part of the world where trees grow. This stunningly-illustrated study offers a tour of the best tree houses in the world, some designed by architects, others the work of unknown craftsmen. Climb into this trove of tree houses and enjoy a new perspective on the world.





THE COFFEE-TABLE BOOK



Ingo Walther and Rainer Metzger: Van Gogh – The Complete Paintings

Vincent van Gogh's story is one of the most ironic in art history. He lived an unhappy and difficult life during which his work received almost no appreciation – and finally, killing himself by a bullet to the chest, so great was his despair. He is now widely considered one of the most important painters of all time, his works fetching record prices of tens of millions of dollars at auction. This comprehensive study of Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) is a detailed monograph about his life and art, combined with a complete catalogue of his 871 paintings.

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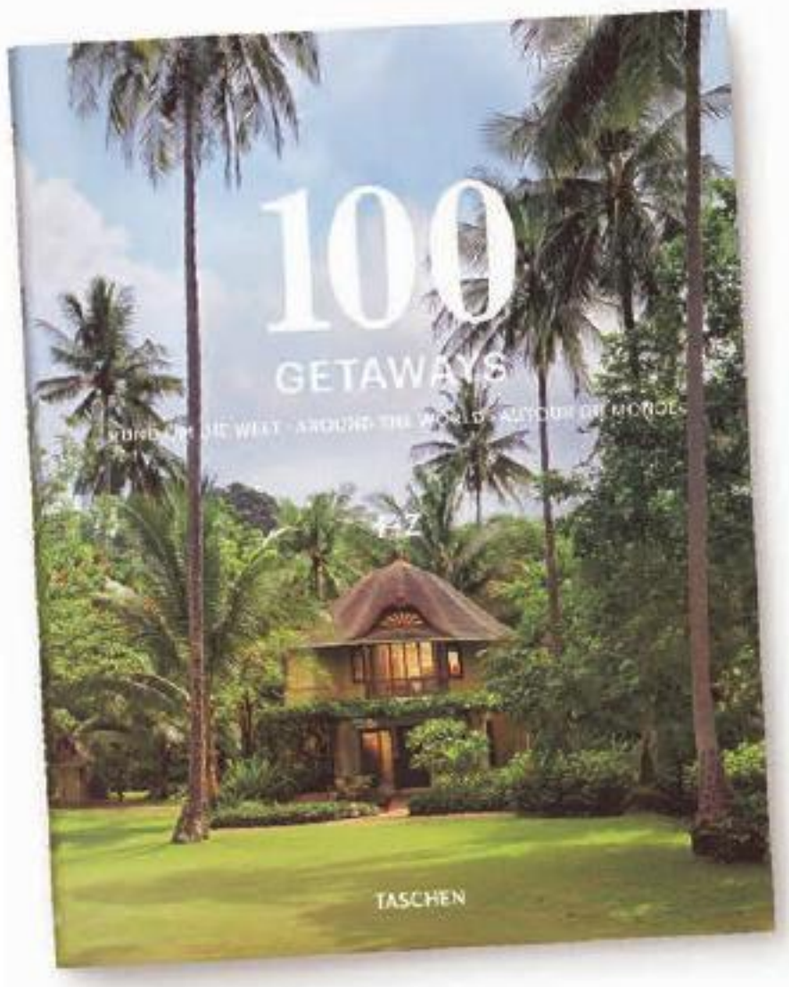
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THE COFFEE-TABLE BOOK

Margit J. Mayer: 100 Getaways Around the World

Discover some of the world's most beautiful retreats, from the comfort of your living room. A compilation of hotels, from Abu Dhabi to Vietnam, the two volumes make it a breeze to choose where to relax next – if the bank account stretches to it. The gamut runs from dream castles like the Villa Feltrinelli on Lake Garda to the glass-fronted hipster chic of the Juvet Hotel in Norway; from Mediterranean *pensiones* with nostalgic flair and moderate rates to the pricey-yet-worthy desert glamour of Amangiri resort in Utah's canyon country.



Five simple ways to style your sofa-table

1 Find a large tray with a colour or pattern that you like to organise your table items and bring cohesion to your arrangement.

2 Incorporate natural elements to bring a touch of the outdoors in. This can be a plant, succulent or even a small piece of weathered driftwood or interesting rock or shell.

3 Include a candle, preferably scented, for lighting ambience and fragrance. Camilleri Paris Mode in Rabat has candles that are as beautiful to look at as they are in scent.

4 A favourite decorative item - think large vintage magnifying glass, a gold elephant statue, a trinket box – anything goes.

5 Last, but not surely not least, a stack of your favourite big illustrated books for both you and your guests to enjoy.

T&T GARDENS

WATER G

The sight and sound of a pool of water is heaven on a sunny day. Filled with floating plants and

ARDENS

graceful, slow-moving fresh-water fish, it can be enjoyed all year round, writes CORINNE VELLA

This is an extraordinarily beautiful example of a Japanese-inspired water garden.



People in ancient Mesopotamia knew a thing or two about fine living. Installing ornamental garden ponds was one of them. Mesopotamia's gardens, including a water feature, were built to imitate nature or as a formal, geometric layout.

In Assyria, designs were ambitious, raising water several stories up in tower gardens. Ponds appeared in the walled gardens of ancient Persia, from where the word 'paradise' is derived. The Maltese and Arabic words for 'heaven' and 'paradise' are also the words for gardens.

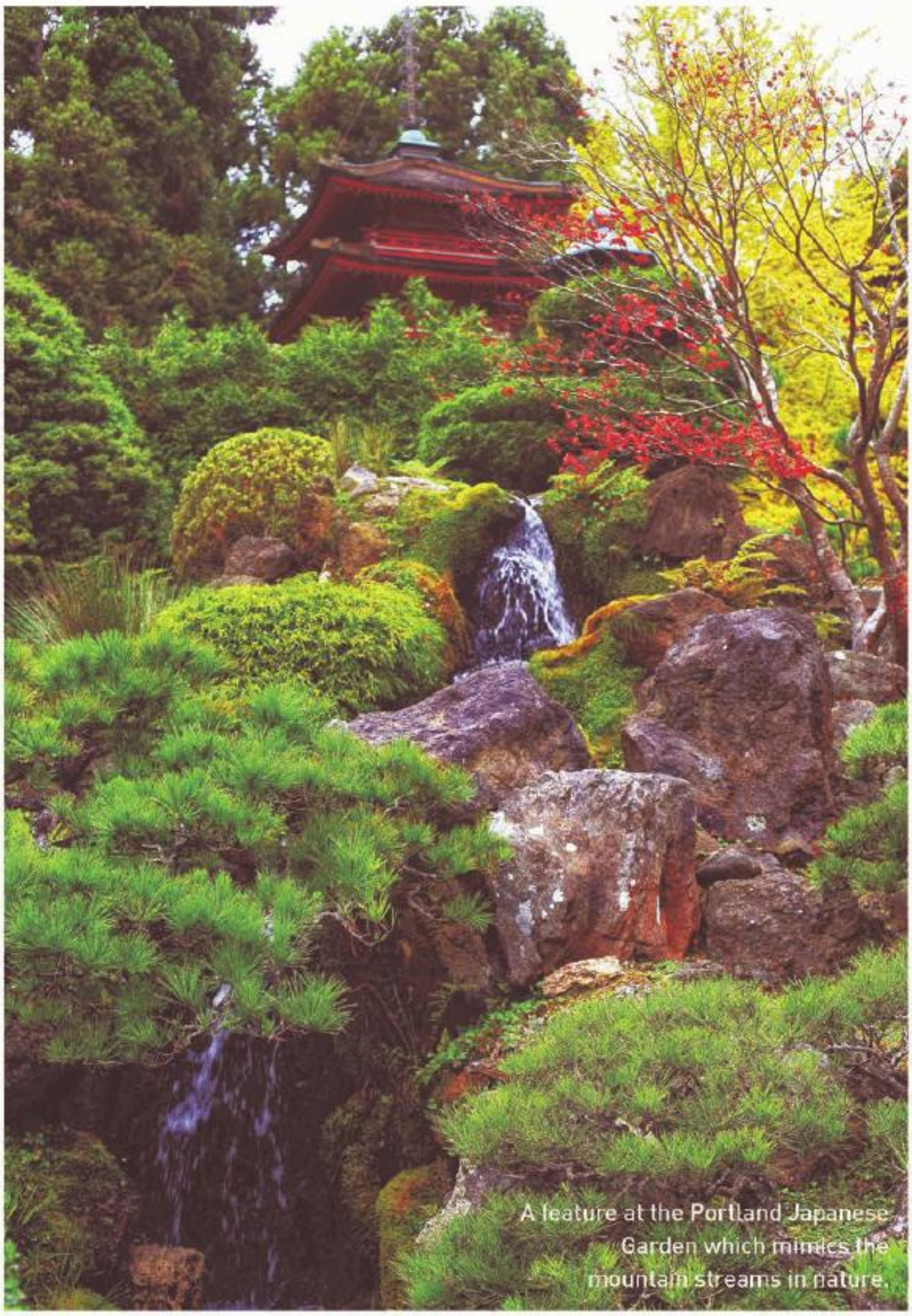
The idea of pleasure gardens was taken up in Muslim civilisation after the Arab conquest of Persia in the seventh century, eventually leading to two of the most iconic water gardens in history: the glorious 14th-century Al Hambra in Spain and the spectacular 17th-century Taj Mahal in India.

Further east, as early as the third century, royal households in China tried to capture the feel of nature in elaborate water gardens. From the moderately sized garden ponds in the typically affluent Chinese household complex to the elaborate artificial lakes built for boating, all were designed on the principles of *shansui*. The purpose was to ensure that positive energy flowed through the garden, providing a place for relaxation and recreation, just as the gardens of Japan were designed to unobtrusively guide those who strolled through them on a contemplative walk.

In European culture, the development of water gardens was mastered in the Italian renaissance. They were planned as works of art and places of distraction and entertainment, their innovations adopted and adapted by the French to suit their particular tastes and preferences, most notably in Versailles. Italy has its own impressive example: the water gardens of the Caserta palace near Naples, which was modelled on Versailles. It has the lot - Renaissance-style waterways, Baroque fountain statuary, an English-style lake-pond, a classical Roman pool complete with artful ruins, and a Japanese pond stocked with large carp.



Waterlilies grow well in Maltese ponds - but they need sunlight.



A feature at the Portland Japanese Garden which mimics the mountain streams in nature.

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The move towards the style and purpose of the traditional water gardens of the East began with the Landscape Movement in England in the 1700s, which rejected formal design in favour of a natural look that informs our idea of the typical English garden up until today. This style inspired the English Garden at the Regia di Caserta.

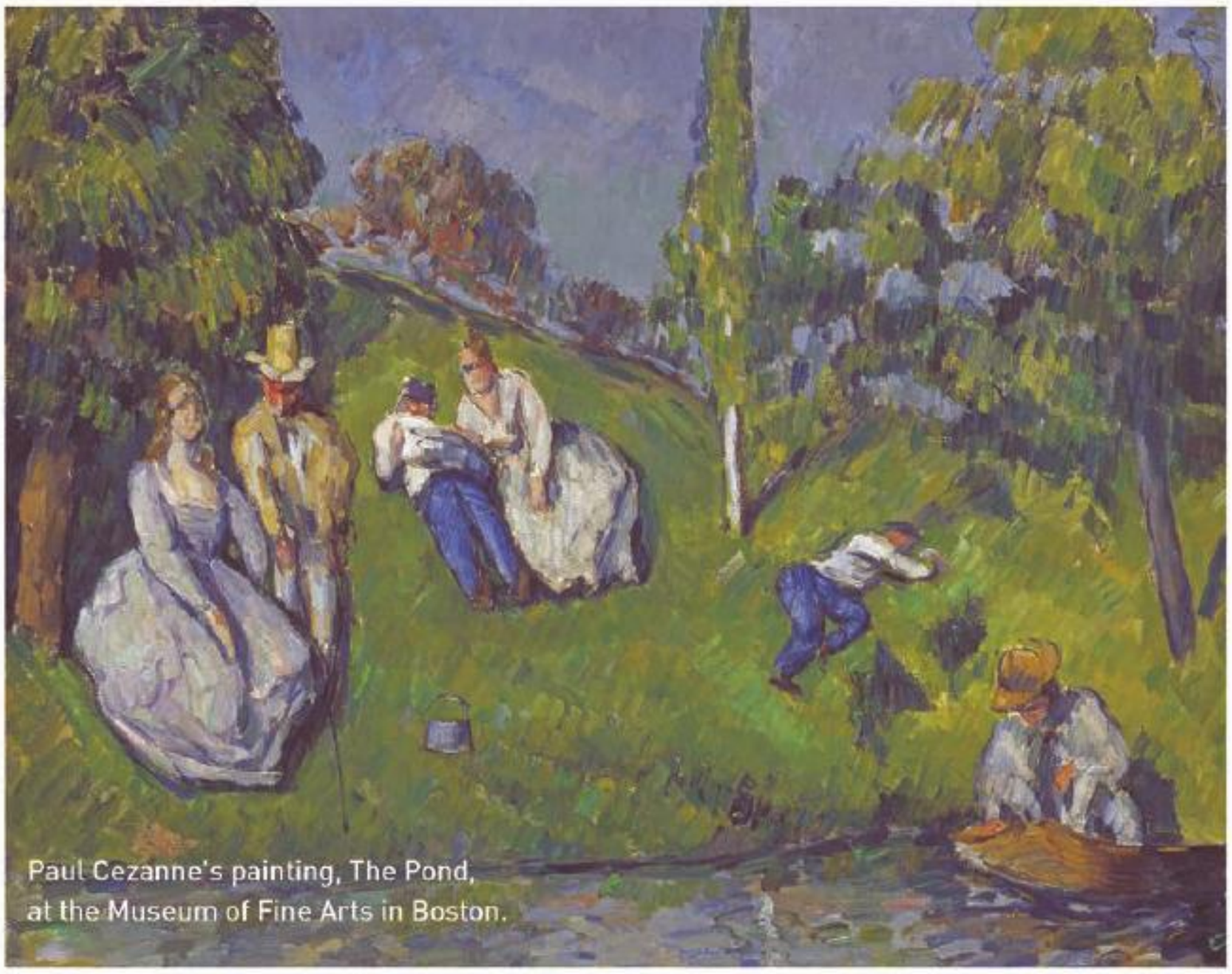
Contemporary water gardens – or garden ponds, for the less romantically inclined – blend the different styles of East and West, though they are considerably much smaller in scale given the size of most garden spaces and courtyards today. An arsenal of pumps, pond liners, and treatment products can be used to keep a water garden healthy and natural looking, but there is a move towards natural eco-systems which use microbiology methods to maintain the necessary balance.

A biologically maintained water garden is planned so that its eco-system develops naturally: fish waste fertilises plants; zooplankton consume bacteria; phytoplankton become algae; fish feed on algae and mosquito eggs, and so on. The size of the pond – its depth as well as its surface area – will determine the types of plants and fish that can be sustained.

Fish should be selected carefully, both in terms of the species and the individual creatures. Large fish will not survive in a small pond, for instance, nor would large numbers of smaller ones. Individual fish should be bought from a reputable supplier to ensure that they do not introduce deadly infections into the pond environment.

Plants will need to be selected for their eco-balance as well as for aesthetic reasons. Floating plants, such as fairy moss, and deep-rooting plants, such as water lilies or water hyacinths, will provide shade and a breeding ground for food for some fish, as well as a colour accent. Tall-growing marsh plants can be set in boggy water around the pond's edges. Oxygenators grow on or under the surface. These absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen, but need regular culling to prevent them taking over the entire pond.

The growing medium (earth) should be weighed down with gravel or pebbles to prevent it being disturbed and muddying the pond water. The heavy gravel will also double up as a feeding bed if you plan to keep koi in your pond. Deep-rooting plants will need to be anchored in pots filled with soil, topped with gravel or pebbles, and sunk to the required depth. Plants which grow only in shallow water can be planted around the



Paul Cezanne's painting, The Pond, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.









edges of the pond where the water is normally shallow, or their pots could be propped up in the deeper areas using stones or bricks.

As with land-based gardens, water gardens need at least basic maintenance but, with the right mix of plants and fish, most of your time will be spent enjoying the sight and sound of your own piece of paradise.

Koi carp and goldfish will mix happily and fare well with plants. Buying large koi is expensive, but small ones grow fairly quickly. If your pond is large enough to sustain them, buy several as they make for a captivating sight. They tend to stay close to the surface and are not shy of humans, coming close to the edge and opening their mouths to be fed once they become accustomed to you. Like goldfish, they come in a variety of shades and patterns, from brilliant orange, through to reddish-orange, yellow and white.

Terrapins thrive merrily in ponds of all sizes and will grow large if they have plenty of room. They will need somewhere to rest and soak up the sun, though – perhaps a rocky ledge jutting out into the water. They are not a good idea, though, if what you are after is a pretty pond, because they decimate plants. Your pond will also need a powerful filter and they will pollute the water quite heavily. It's also important to remember that fish and terrapins don't mix. Large terrapins will eat smaller fish and terrapins of all sizes eat fish-eggs and newly-hatched fish. This means that your fish population will not grow.

You need not have a large garden to have a pond. Though many people prefer to put in a plunge-pool if their outdoor space is restricted, it is really worth considering having a pond instead. A beautifully proportioned pond is more aesthetically gratifying than an unsatisfying small plunge-pool and it also has a greater cooling and soothing effect on the senses. Courtyards fare well with stone-basin ponds and just a few goldfish and a couple of water-lilies, but if you plan to keep a fountain or a water-spout running, your water-lilies will not survive as they need still water and not the constant disturbance that splashing or running water causes.

This is a pond in the Botanical Garden in Brooklyn, New York.

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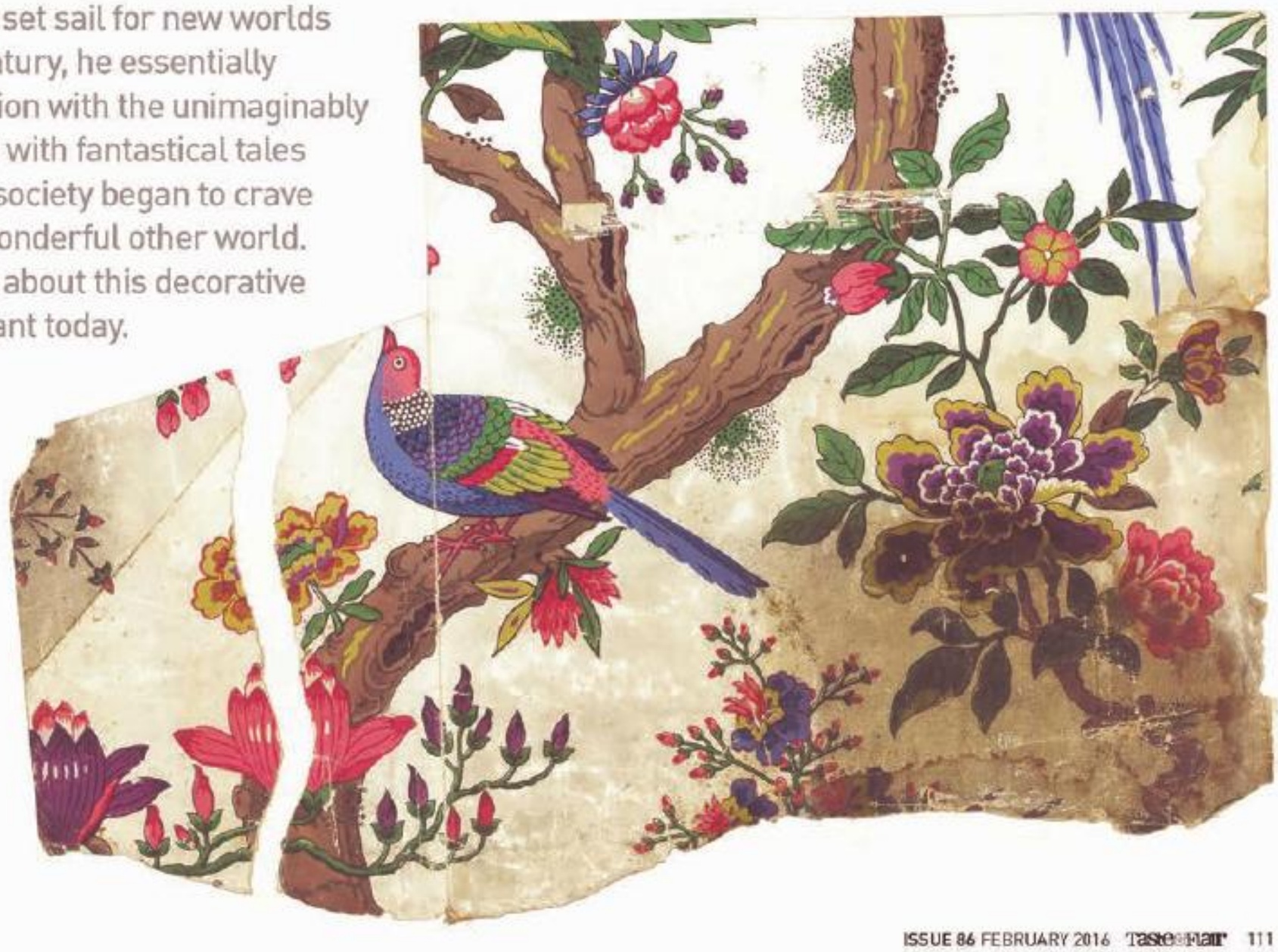


A detail from the decoration on an 18th-century French bombe secretaire.

CHINOISERIE

Imagining the Exotic Orient

When Marco Polo's ship set sail for new worlds unknown in the 13th century, he essentially began Europe's fascination with the unimaginably exotic East. He returned with fantastical tales of his travels European society began to crave a connection with this wonderful other world. SACHA STAPLES writes about this decorative style that remains relevant today.



This is a scrap of 18th century wallpaper from the palace at Fontainebleau.



This chest of drawers is by Moissonnier in the traditional form but with a contemporary update.

After the European discovery of the strange, rare world to the east, Silk Road became the main route for the importation of luxurious silk, spices, porcelain, lacquerware and precious stones, loaded high atop camels and carts and carried overland across Asia to the port of Constantipole, from where Venetian ships took them to Venice for onward journeys by land and river to the cities of the continent. The journey was so time-consuming, complicated and costly that the prices of these goods were astronomical. They were the ultimate in luxury and that increased their prestige.

The demand for Asian goods reached its peak during the 17th and 18th centuries. Demand was then at its highest, driven by the fashion for oriental inspiration in the grand rooms of palaces and mansions, but also because China cut down on its trade restrictions. It was a proverbial opening of the floodgates. Fourteen ships sailed from London to Canton in 1747, a frequency not repeated for another 20 years. As a result, a new decorative style emerged: Chinoiserie.

A French term meaning "in the Chinese style", chinoiserie is entirely a European invention – borne from the Western appetite for exotic worldly goods. Although there were authentic pieces coming from the Orient, European designers and artists took advantage of slow trade times by creating their own oriental-inspired pieces for European consumption.

"Orient" was a term created by Europeans to refer to a myriad of cultures spanning from Persia to China and simply means 'the East'. It is today considered a pejorative term, but in the context of this story it helps explain the historical significance and current examples of the chinoiserie decorative style.



Above: Decorative detail from the Royal Pavilion in Brighton.
Below: The Royal Pavilion in Brighton.





Above: Blue and white porcelain and branches of blossoms used to create a Chinoiserie effect. Right: This Delftware plate was made in Liverpool in the 18th century and is decorated with the Chinese-inspired motifs of the period.



Adorning a room in the chinoiserie style was the ultimate status symbol for wealthy Europeans – evidence of a connection to these faraway lands, and a way of flaunting wealth, taste and status. Each decorative piece, fabric, wall covering and carpet was a token of the journey. No European palace or English country house was without its Chinese room at the time. Many of these rooms have survived into the present and have been restored. Others have been taken intact into museums to be preserved for posterity.

And it was not only goods that made their way along the Silk Road to Europe, but people as well. Wealthy aristocrats would often "import" Asian acrobats and entertainers to perform, amidst backdrops of champagne towers and grand ballrooms, at their most lavish parties.

It is generally believed that the style was popularised by the court of Louis XV (Marie Antoinette's father-in-law) at Versailles. The prevalent decorating style of the time was Rococo, which was characterised by an elaborate ornamentalism, which seemed perfectly at harmony with the whimsy of chinoiserie wallpapers, silks, furniture and porcelain.

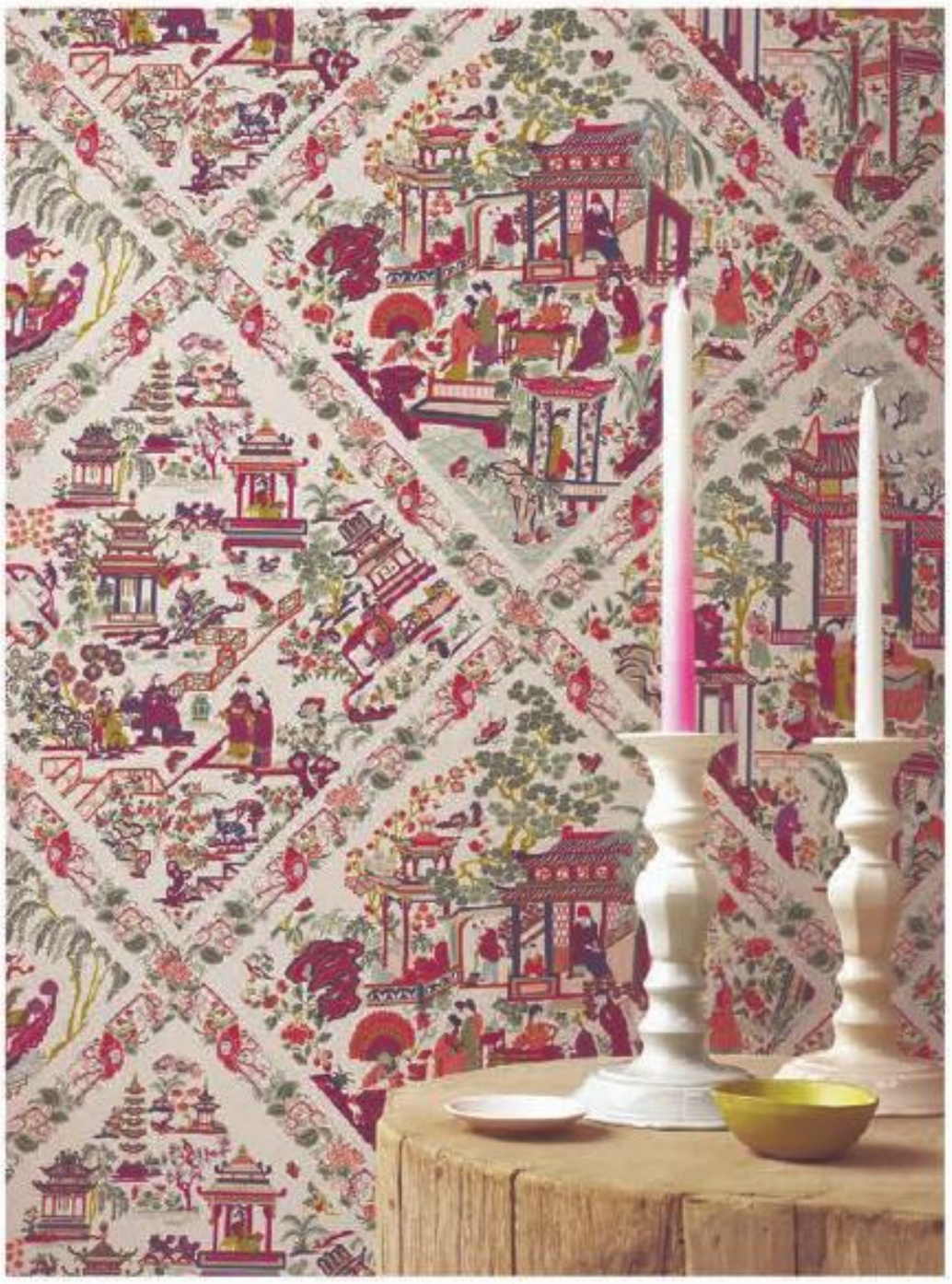
Chinoiserie became particularly popular amongst the aristocratic women of the time, since the exotic landscapes and bird and floral motifs were well suited to feminine preferences and spaces, such as bedrooms, dressing-rooms and drawing-rooms. Around this time, Europeans also picked up the Chinese ritual of drinking tea, which in turn led to a rampant demand for teapots, cups and saucers in the chinoiserie style.

So what distinguishes chinoiserie? It is easily defined in that it is so easily recognisable. It is a product of European's fantasies of an imagined East. Before the arrival of photography, European artists and designers who created pieces in the chinoiserie style relied on the written accounts and descriptions of those who had actually travelled to the East, such as Marco Polo centuries prior, as well as their own artful imaginations. It is very much a style that blends fact and fiction – symmetry of contrasts – making it entirely modern in its own right.

Chinoiserie prints and objects often include an assortment of Asian landscapes (think Chinese gardens with arched bridges and weeping willows); Chinese flowers and plants (think lotus leaves and bamboo); pagodas with upswept roofs and intricate fretwork; birds, elephants and dragons, sometimes in costume; tassels and bells. Then there are the lacquered furniture and porcelain pots and vases, typically in white and blue, which are also characteristic of the style. Chinoiserie is a whimsical interpretation of what the Orient might have been like, and it is this fantastical element that makes the style so appealing.

Perhaps the most comprehensive example of chinoiserie may be found at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton. Unlike other palatial homes and buildings in Europe, which housed a "Chinese" room, the entire Pavilion, both its interiors and exterior, is a celebration of the style.

Completed in 1822, under the reign of King George IV, the Pavilion is a quintessential pleasure palace, an escape into an exotic world on the Southern shores of England. With its Indo-Islamic exterior and chinoiserie interior, the Pavilion is an "oriental fantasy", and a celebration of the King's affinity for the extravagant and fantastical style.



Above: Braquenie's L'Empire du Milieu wallpaper.
Right: This wallpaper is by Miles Redd for Schumacher.



Chinoiserie has maintained its decor status as one of the most cherished styles of leading designers. California-based designer Kelly Wearstler, whose personal decorating style was described by Elle Decor as encapsulating "contemporary sophistication and wit, with a nod to the past and a wink at the future", is known for blending chinoiserie with the Hollywood Regency style.

Manhattan designer Miles Redd has recently launched his collection of wall coverings and fabrics with Schumacher, which include a selection of chinoiserie prints, inspired by the Royal Pavilion in Brighton. "I've never walked into a chinoiserie room I didn't love," says Redd. The 'Brighton Pavilion' material was modelled from a set of antique Swedish paper panels from Redd's personal collection, featuring vibrantly coloured peacocks, flowers and leaves. In his signature eclectic fashion, Redd has paired the chinoiserie wall covering with two antique side chairs upholstered in the Wave fabric, creating a modern blend of pattern and line. This is fearless decorating at its best.

In Malta, purveyors of a particular type of home decor, like Camilleri Paris Mode and Grey & Adler, have more than a few treasures featuring chinoiserie. Moissonnier's blue and white commode, available at the former, is a metaphorical fusion of East and West – built in the style of Louis XV's court, with a quintessential Chinoiserie pattern. Braquenie's L'Empire du Milieu wallpaper (the name refers to China's old title of Middle Kingdom) is made of embroidered cotton and features four repeating scenes reproduced from a rare shawl made in Chine in the late 1800s, a treasure found in Braquenie's archives. L'Objet's Han Spice Jewels (in gold and platinum plating) are like miniature pagodas for your dining-table, while the Cinnabar and China Love candles add a touch of traditional Chinese lacquerware to your decor.

If you are living under the thumb of a neutral decorating palette, or simply need to enliven your home with a touch of the exotic, then perhaps it is time to introduce at least a touch of chinoiserie into your space. It is a decorating style that adds sophistication, playfulness and whimsy, and it perfectly complements traditional and antique pieces, as well as those with more modern lines.

A traditional French chest of drawers in the style of the 18th century, decorated with Chinoiserie motifs. Top: A mural beneath Chinoiserie wallpaper - www.nicoletteatelier.com. Right: This is a way in which affordable chinoiserie can be incorporated into the home www.emilymccarthy.com.

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SILVER *COFFEE-POTS*

This is the fascinating story behind the silver coffee-pot, a household object that is now a purely decorative item.



A Maltese silver coffee-pot adds a small but significant touch of antique luxury to contemporary interiors. It doesn't have to be placed in the conservative manner on a highly polished mahogany sideboard in an old-fashioned dining-room, or on a seriously antique credenza in a formal drawing-room. If you're lucky enough to have inherited a silver pot, or have the budget to buy one, then integrate it into a younger, fresher environment by mixing it casually with contemporary ornaments on a rough wooden surface or minimalist table.

Reception in the Garden, by Giovan **Battista Rossi, 1762, Naples, Private collection.**

Coffee was first traded in Europe in the late 1500s, though it had been grown and drunk in the Middle East for centuries before that. Most of the coffee exported to European markets through the Venetian port came in those early years from the ports of Alexandria and Smyrna, and fetched prices that were extraordinarily high, even by today's standards.

Hot coffee was startlingly novel to a European population that had previously quenched its thirst on cold small beer and hot possets. The methods of preparation, the equipment and the accompanying rituals brought great social change, particularly as prices began to fall when new sources of supply were found. By 1675, London had more than 250 coffee houses, which also sold chocolate - another exotic arrival - and alcohol. These were frequented only by men, in much the same way that typical Mediterranean coffee-shops are today. The London coffee-houses attracted tradesmen, intellectuals and writers. As coffee became fashionable, women began to drink it, too, but only in their own apartments. For this purpose, they acquired the appropriate silver and porcelain.

Coffee became fashionable in Malta quite early on, too, and drinking it was a social activity, much more so than today, when there are other entertainments to keep us amused. Special silver coffee-pots were de rigueur in the fashionable and well-to-do households of the 17th and 18th centuries, not as ornaments but as functional objects. The flamboyant and highly decorative baroque style of the late 17th century lent itself well to designs for coffee vessels of various shapes.

The most popular models can be divided into four basic types: those with amphora-shaped bodies, also known as baluster types, those with pear-shaped bodies, those with twisted pear-shaped bodies, and those of a smaller size than normal. Those of the last type differ from the other three only in terms of size; they are 13cm-20cm high instead of the standard 30-40cm. These small coffee-pots are sometimes called *egoiste* pots, because they hold only enough coffee for one person. The notion itself seems curious, since coffee was traditionally a beverage consumed in the company of friends. These pieces are rare, and are sometimes found partnered by a standard-sized coffee-pot of identical form and decoration. The body of the pot is often decorated with beautiful *repoussé* work.



Balthasar Denner, 1685-1749 - A Portrait of the Artist's Daughter Holding a Cup of Coffee.



















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An 18th-century illustration showing a lady drinking coffee.

The base of the earlier coffee-pots was a solid plinth. Pots of the later 18th century were supported by three clawed feet or hooves. In Maltese coffee-pots, the spout was usually an integral part of the body, but some had separately-attached spouts, which extended upwards from the 'belly' of the pot. These are called swan- or bird-neck spouts. Lids were either hinged at the handle or left loose. Hinged covers often bear thumb pieces, by means of which the lid could be raised by pressing down on them with the thumb. Lids were invariably topped with a finial, perhaps an acorn or pine cone, though the coffee-pots of the late 18th century often had more imposing and sculptural forms. The handle was generally made of polished wood.

Pots with finials that move sideways on a tiny pivot, to reveal an opening, were not intended for coffee but for chocolate. A swivel stick was inserted through the opening and used to stir. Curiously, we remain uncertain as to whether the Maltese of the 18th century drank tea, which had already gained considerably in popularity in Europe.

Coffee-pots, like almost all other silver items of the period, were marked by the silversmith. These assay marks included the symbol of the reigning grandmaster, to indicate the period in which it was made, such as the *fleur-de-lys* of the Wignacourt family and the cotton-plant of the Cotoner house. The silversmith's mark was usually composed of his initials or a truncated form of his name, like BRUN for Giovanni Le Brun,







The Coffee House, Circle of Pietro Longhi, 1750-1770, Intesa Sanpaolo Collection, Gallerie Italia Palazzo Leone Montanari, Vicenza, Italy.



who was master of the mint in 1787, and AP for Annetto Pullicino, who was consul for silversmiths in 1755.

The letters MA under an eight-pointed cross, with some variations, denotes the period. For example, MA surmounted by the eight-pointed cross and an open crown points to the reign of grandmaster Pinto. A lozenge shape surmounted by a closed crown denotes the reign of grandmaster de Rohan.

The design evolution of Maltese silver coffee-pots follows through from baroque to rococo and Empire styles. Sugar-basins were often manufactured separately, and though in some cases they may be matched, it is not certain that the silversmith in question was commissioned to produce both for the same client. Sugar was not necessarily added to coffee in those days.

Analysis of the exquisite designs of so many Maltese silver coffee-pots, together with their intrinsic characteristics, like the line of the handle, the application of the decoration, and the overall balance of the various parts, are the basic elements by which their quality is judged. While some are inclined to the more baroque designs, others prefer the clean and simple lines of the earlier coffee-pots.

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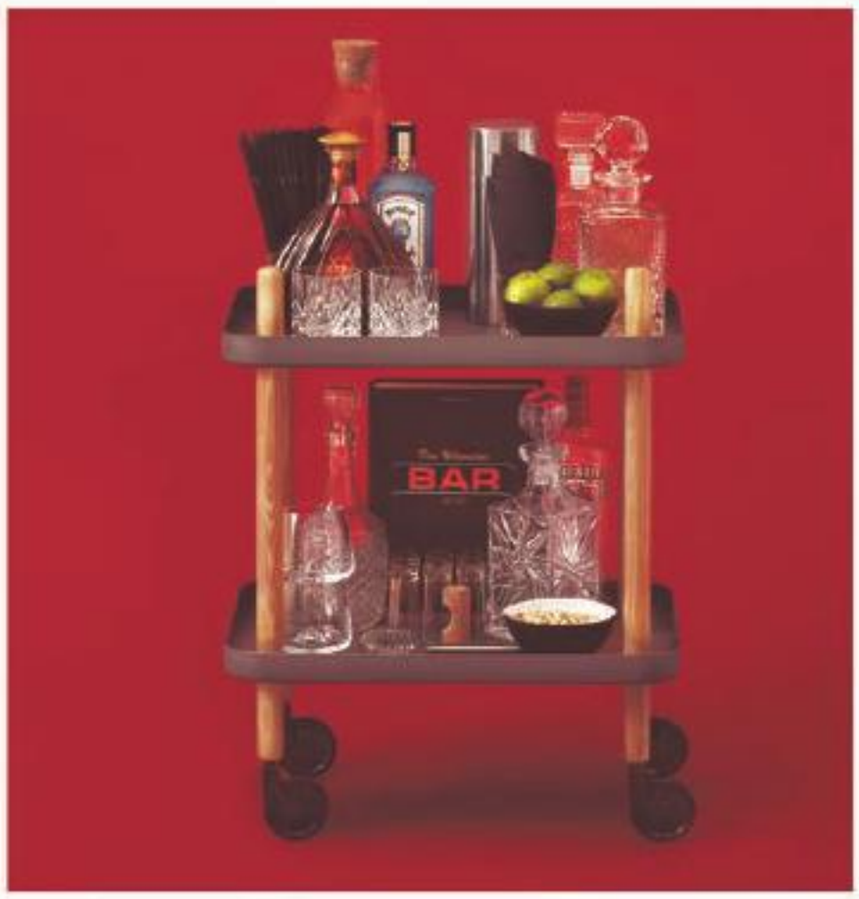


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